Student Engagement in Modern Foreign Languages: A Pedagogical Model

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Declaration

I declare that the present thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation, assignment, or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma, or any other qualifications.

Nicolás Pino James

Abstract

This study proposes a practitioner-oriented model for fostering student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive (ASEC) engagement in learning activities, and it assesses its potential to achieve such aims. The rationale underpinning this research is that the UK currently faces a social problem of negative attitudes towards foreign language learning. This is manifested by the steep decline in the number of schoolchildren that take up Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in upper secondary education. In light of this, research has consistently demonstrated that attitudes towards learning languages can be transformed if we regularly provide students with engaging experiences in the classroom. Unfortunately, pedagogical solutions that guide secondary schoolteachers on how to engineer engaging classrooms on a daily basis are scarce in educational research.

This study uses an action research approach to assess the potential of the proposed pedagogical model to stimulate student ASEC engagement in MFL contexts. This entails two consecutive implementations of the model among a group of 19 Year 9 (difficult and male-dominated) students of Spanish by means of two long-term learning activities. The results from both implementations seem to confirm that the proposed practitioner-oriented model can contribute to promoting student engagement in learning activities at academic, social, emotional, and cognitive levels when it is fully deployed. The study contributes to the field of MFL primarily by offering an assessed pedagogical model that can stimulate regular student ASEC engagement in the MFL classroom, which, in turn, may contribute to the positive transformation of student attitudes towards foreign language learning.

Abbreviations

API	Extract from after-project interview with students
AR	Action Research
ASEC	Academic, Social, Emotional, and Cognitive
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
KS3	Key Stage 3
KS4	Key Stage 4
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
PI	Extract from interview with Pamela
ProE	Pro/Promote Engagement
RJ	Extract from research journal
RS	Extract from reflection sheets
T	Turn

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Focus and Aims

This research study evaluates a newly designed pedagogical model to foster **student engagement** in learning activities amongst secondary students of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). The construct of student engagement in learning activities is understood in light of four dimensions: academic engagement, social engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement (ASEC engagement). Academic engagement refers to positive academic conduct in the learning activity (e.g., on-task behaviour); social engagement refers to positive social conduct in the learning activity (e.g., behaviour according to classroom and school norms), emotional engagement refers to positive emotional reactions to the learning activity (e.g., happiness); and finally, cognitive engagement refers to psychological investment in the learning activity (e.g., effort to develop the activity). These four dimensions, united, form the single concept of student engagement at the activity level.

The rationale underpinning this research is that the UK currently faces a social problem of negative attitudes towards foreign language learning (Bartram 2010). This is manifested for example, by (a) the decrease in enrolment figures for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in MFL, which declined from 76% to 48% between 2002 and 2013 (Holmes 2014); (b) the low number of MFL entrants for A-level (Malpass 2014), which has dropped over 50% since 1996, specifically in French and German; and (c) the steep decline in university applications for languages, which, since 1998, has resulted in 50% fewer universities offering French, German, and Spanish degrees (UCAS 2013).

In this respect, research has demonstrated that attitudes towards learning languages can be significantly transformed if we regularly provide students with engaging experiences in the classroom (e.g., Dörnyei 1998, 2003; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; McPake et al., 1999; Nikolov 1998). This seems to be because cumulative experiences of engagement (or disengagement) in the classroom seem to largely determine student perception of a particular school subject (Herrenkohl & Guerra, 1998; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Therefore, in a country in which students do not seem to be enjoying language learning (Gruneberg & Sykes, 1994), regularly facilitating engagement experiences in the MFL classroom becomes key to increasing student uptake of the subject.

Moreover, pedagogical solutions that guide secondary schoolteachers on how to engineer engaging (MFL) classrooms on a daily basis are scarce in engagement research. This seems to be due to a series of factors such as the fact that engagement research has primarily focused on combating high, school dropout rates (see Eccles & Wang, 2012, for a discussion); hence the interest in school engagement rather than in classroom engagement. Furthermore, engagement research has mostly concentrated on developing its theoretical side (see Christenson et al., 2012, for an illustration of this).

Given the preceding, in this present study I propose the ProE model (where Pro- stands for 'promote' and 'E' for engagement) for fostering student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities, and I assess its potential to achieve such aims. This is a practitioner-oriented model composed of four facilitators of engagement that, when deployed jointly in an activity, can contribute to fostering engagement in four dimensions. These facilitators are meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence. Meaningfulness relates to the student's perception of the activities' value; autonomy refers to the student's sense of empowerment when engaged in activities; belongingness relates to activities that promote healthy social relationships with both

peers and teacher; and finally, competence is connected to the student's ability to complete the activity successfully or efficiently.

In addition, this study uses an **action research approach,** which seems to be key to obtaining a rich understanding of the potential of the ProE model to stimulate student ASEC engagement in MFL contexts. Some of the aspects of action research that contribute to obtaining the aforementioned objective are: (a) action research is participative (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), which allows for assessing the functioning of the ProE model from 'within' (i.e., as a teacher) in addition to from 'outside' (i.e., as a researcher); (b) action research has a cyclical nature (Denscombe, 2010), which allows for assessing the ProE model several times consecutively to ensure its validity to foster student ASEC engagement in a particular research context; and (c) action research is majorly qualitative (Schwalbach 2003; Zeni 1998) , which allows for deeper delving into the studied phenomenon.

However, this study differs slightly from the action research credo (hence, the action research approach) since, firstly, it seeks to make its findings transferable to other MFL classrooms across Britain and, secondly, the intervention is carried out by a researcher in the role of a teacher (rather than the reverse) in a teaching context that is not his own.

It is therefore hoped that from this research, a successful practitioner-oriented model for fostering student engagement can emerge, potentially inspiring schoolteachers to tackle the issue of negative student attitudes towards MFL from their own classrooms, and ultimately increase student uptake in further school stages. As previously mentioned, the classroom seems to be the context in which student attitudes towards MFL seem mostly affected; it is also a more accessible setting. That is to say, it is likely easier to make changes at the classroom level where the language teacher is protagonist, supposedly, with an agenda favouring student uptake than it would be, for example, to change an institutional view, whose position towards MFL could be driven by external interests

(e.g., emphasising other subject areas to satisfy society's demands) therefore making it less susceptible to change.

A better solution to the problem of student uptake though, would be combining student engagement with the promotion of the value of foreign language learning to employability. This is because prior research has demonstrated that employability is a powerful sociocultural influence towards transforming student attitudes towards MFL (e.g., Bartram 2010; Evans & Fisher, 2009; Fisher 2001; McCrone et al., 2005; Young 1994b), in addition to student engagement, of course. Additionally, it is my view that student engagement alone, despite being necessary for the positive development of attitudes, would not be sufficient to increase student uptake of MFL. I feel that although enjoying the MFL subject can have a positive impact on student attitudes, it may not necessarily make MFL a priority subject area (such as English, Math or Science) because of its current lowly status in the British society (see Bartram 2010, for a discussion). Having said that, unfortunately, an intervention combining student engagement in MFL and employability would go beyond the narrow focus of a PhD study, which is why this present investigation looks solely at fostering student engagement. The research question this study thus addresses is:

- **To what extent does the implementation of the ProE model foster student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities in MFL settings?**

1.2 Motivation for the Study

Coming from Spain where learning foreign languages is in some respects regarded as more important than learning any other subject, I have always been curious about why other countries think differently. On coming to the UK 6 years ago as an Erasmus undergraduate student I was surprised by the fact that most of my British classmates did

not speak foreign languages while the majority of the other Erasmus students (e.g., French, Italian, Spanish, etc.) spoke, at least, another foreign language, in addition to English. What perhaps was more striking for me was not that the British students generally did not speak foreign languages, but that they did not appear to want to study languages. And this was despite being in a multilingual environment in which, on a daily basis, people spoke multiple languages, not just in our classroom or at the university, but also in the streets. Whenever I discussed this with my British classmates they were indeed regretful about not speaking foreign languages, but would go no further, making no plans to learn a foreign language. I knew that with English being the international language there was less need for them to make the huge effort that learning a foreign language required, but this was certainly not enough for me. I simply could not understand the low levels of interest that I was witnessing.

At the beginning, I thought that perhaps this was due to the university I attended: it was not a top UK university, and, perhaps the students were simply not as hard-working and/or success-driven as in other universities — and thus, less inclined to make the effort required to learn a foreign language. I even thought at the time that the area, the Midlands, could have been a contributing factor since it was less international than other parts of the UK such as, London for example. This could have potentially explained why students would not have appreciated the importance of speaking foreign languages.

Overall, the Erasmus experience planted a seed in me, one that would begin to flourish a few years later when I began to socialise with MFL teachers, mostly of Spanish origin. In our work discussions, more often than not the issue of poor student attitudes towards learning languages would arise, always making me reminisce about my personal experience as an Erasmus student. The more teachers I met, from different schools and different parts of England, and the more I conversed with them, the clearer I could see that the negative attitudes towards language learning that I had witnessed at university

may potentially have originated in the school years. However, this occurred while I was pursuing a Master's degree in English language teaching with a specialism in educational technology. Somewhat predictably then, this became the initial topic of my PhD research (i.e., the motivational use of technology in the language classroom) rather than attitudes towards MFL. Perhaps a subconscious deterrent was the fact that I knew very little about school education in the UK, thus, pursuing the technology route felt like the safer choice, given my competence and degree of comfort with it at the time.

Then, upon starting the PhD, the hunt for a research context began and that is when I found myself in a small café in England, having a chat with my friend Pamela (pseudonym), an MFL teacher at a Catholic school in the Midlands. Although the nature of our meeting was initially personal, I ended up sharing my research ideas with her. That was when she told me that her school would be interested in an intervention designed to increase the motivation and engagement of its MFL students, as it seemed to be generally low. This comment inevitably reignited my interest in the topic of student attitudes towards MFL, which I had set aside in order to focus on a more technology-related study. The question of whether I should pursue this research path now appeared. I decided to give it some thought.

After doing some research on the state of the issue, I realised that the problem of low uptake of MFL in Britain was much worse than expected. Furthermore, additional reading helped me to quickly locate the root of the problem and even come up with some ideas for a possible solution. Then, it became clear how I should direct my efforts. Suddenly, researching the motivational use of technology in the language classroom was no longer such a stimulating topic; at least, it certainly did not have as much appeal as helping increase the number of students who study foreign languages at GCSE and beyond in Britain. I felt that if I were to contribute to the field of applied linguistics (and by extension, to society) with my research, it would be to satisfy a need rather than to

keep up with the trends, which is seemingly the case of technology in language learning. Hence, the research study that you have before you today.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises eight chapters in total: introduction, background of the study, literature review, research methodology, action research cycle zero, action research cycle one, action research cycle two, and conclusion. In the present chapter, Chapter One, I introduce the research focus and aims of my study, followed by my underlying personal motivations. In Chapter Two (Background), I move on to discuss the background of the study. This chapter begins by describing the current situation regarding MFL uptake in the UK and ends by putting forward the fostering of student engagement as part of a potential solution to combat the present low uptake of MFL in Key Stage 4 and further school stages. Chapter Three (Literature Review) is mostly concerned with the design and presentation of the ProE model for student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities. Thus, firstly it provides a working conceptualization of student engagement for this study. It then underscores the rationale underpinning the development of the ProE model for academic, social, emotional and cognitive student engagement in learning activities. Finally, it concludes by rationalising the selection of *projects* as the type of learning activity that embodies the ProE model in this particular study. The participants in this investigation, the research method employed, the data collection instruments, the approach to data analysis, and ethical considerations are discussed in Chapter Four (Methodology). In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I cover the action research process. This includes: an account of the work done prior to implementing the ProE model (Chapter Five); an account of each of the four stages of action research (i.e., planning, acting, observing and reflecting) for each of the two research cycles conducted in this study, which corresponds to the two consecutive implementations of the ProE model

(Chapters Six and Seven). Finally, in Chapter Eight, I conclude by providing a summary of the findings of this study followed by implications for research and practice, limitations and future research directions.

Chapter Two: Background of the Study

2.1 Introduction

As stated earlier in Chapter One, this chapter concentrates on presenting the foundations upon which this research study on promoting student engagement is built. Therefore, the sections that follow are concerned with providing a discussion on the problem of low student uptake of MFL in British secondary education, and proposing a practical solution to potentially tackle this problem. In 2.2 I describe the current status of MFL uptake in the UK. Then, in 2.3 I propose fostering student engagement in the MFL classroom as part of a solution to counteract the current low uptake of MFL in KS4 and more advanced school stages.

2.2 A Shortage of Positive Attitudes towards MFL

The majority of schoolchildren are reluctant to learn modern foreign languages in the UK, so echo the multiple governmental and international reports, research studies, and the national press. Seemingly, the number of students entering GCSE in MFL has dropped from 76% to 48% between 2002 and 2013. And this drop is especially evident in French and German (see Holmes 2014, for a discussion).

The issue of the declining number of students taking up MFL in KS3 and beyond is not new and has consistently been reported since the early days of the introduction of both the National Curriculum and the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Clark & Trafford, 1996; Graham 2002; Rawlinson 2001). During this time, the Government, in conjunction with educational stakeholders and employers, has fought for the need to motivate learners to take up languages after the age of 14. Special mention should be made of the following initiatives: The Nuffield Languages Inquiry in

2000, the National Languages Strategy in 2002, and later on, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in 2010. Regarding the latter, results from recent reports present cautious room for optimism. According to the report, from 2012 to 2013, there has been an increase in the number of students entering GCSE in MFL (from 41% to 48%) and this seems to be partly related to the introduction of the EBacc[1] (British Council & CfBT, 2014).

However, in spite of this increase, the overall situation remains concerning since the overall number of A-level MFL entrants has been shrinking since 1996, especially in the case of French and German (Figure 1). This has occurred in a time frame in which the total number of A-level entries has risen by 31% (Malpass 2014).

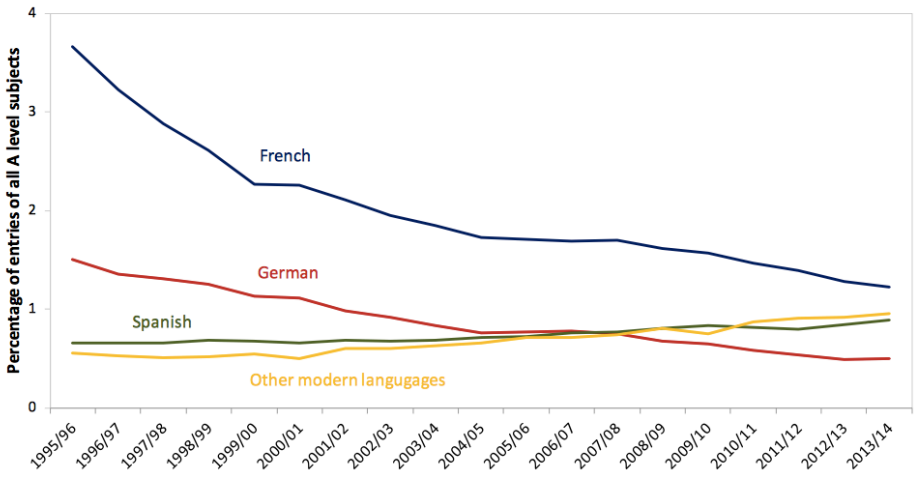

Figure 2.1: MFL Entrants for A-level (DfE 2014: 14)

In fact, at the time of writing this paper, the three MFL (French, German and Spanish), out of all the EBacc subjects, have the lowest GCSE to A-level progression rates. Moreover, the number of students obtaining grade A* in A-level MFL has been on the decline since the implementation of the EBacc in 2010 (Malpass 2014). Regarding student language ability, in the first European Survey on Language Competencies conducted in 2012 among fourteen participating countries (European Commission

[1] The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a performance measure for schools. It is granted when students score C or higher at GCSE level over five scholastic subjects including language.

2012b), the UK comes last in the number of students achieving an intermediate level in foreign language (level B1 of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Even more concerning, 30% of students did not achieve a beginner level (level A1 of the CEFR).

In view of the preceding, it can be argued that the UK is not only a country where languages are not studied at GCSE and beyond but also a place where language users have a limited command of foreign languages. This seems to be a rather disappointing outcome for a country that spends 18% more on education per child (between the ages of 6 and 15) than the OECD average (OECD 2014).

The reasons behind the decreasing number of language students nationwide seem to be several. To date, the source of the issue remains uncertain making it challenging for educational authorities to intervene to fully resolve the problem. While it is true that students' low motivation is the new catchphrase resonating across the educational landscape (see Coleman et al., 2007, for a discussion), it seems that the root of the problem is located at a higher level. Scholars seem to attribute the issue of students' poor motivation to a nationally hostile climate for language learning (e.g., Coleman et al., 2007; Johnstone 2007; Leighton 1991; McPake et al., 1999; Mitchell 2003; Pachler et al., 2007; Saunders 1998; Watts 2003). This statement seems to suggest that the UK is arguably a place were speaking a foreign language is generally perceived as of limited relevance (Malpass, 2014).

The preceding arguments thus seem to indicate that schoolchildren in the UK are facing a serious problem of attitudes, a concept that is defined in this study as a settled way of thinking or feeling about learning a language that reflects on one's personal behaviour. This assumption is supported by a national survey conducted by The Times Educational Supplement in 2002, which concluded that "across all schools, the greatest obstacle to expanding language learning is seen as pupil attitudes (Ward 2002: 6).

Furthermore, in the literature it is regularly argued that the problem of insular attitudes could be sensibly connected to one or many of the following individual, educational and sociocultural variables (see Bartram 2010, for a discussion):

Individual variables

- Perceptions of difficulty (Coleman et al., 2007; Graham 2002; Gruneberg & Sykes, 1994; McPake et al., 1999; Saunders 1998)
- Lack of perceived progress (Graham 2004; Malpass 2014)
- Achieving low scores (Aplin 1991; Chambers 1999; Fisher 2001; Wringe 1989)

Educational Influences

- Poor teacher-student relationships (Aplin 1991; Chambers 1999; Clark & Trafford, 1995; Fisher 2001; Nikolov 1998; Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993; Stables & Wikeley, 1999; Wright 1999)
- Overuse of the target language (Kent 1996; Lee et al., 1998; Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993; Stables & Wikeley, 1999)
- Meaningless learning activities (Aplin 1991; Clark & Trafford, 1995; Kent 1996; Lee et al., 1998; Stables & Wikeley, 1999; Vasseur & Grandcolas, 1997)
- Little use of technology in the classroom (Austin & Mendlick, 1993; Kenny 2002; Leahy 2000; Wringe 1989)
- Dissatisfaction with the textbooks (Chambers 1994; Clark & Trafford, 1995; Fisher 2001; Kent 1996; Wright 1999)
- Poor status of MFL within the school (Dobson 1998; McPake et al., 1999; Ward 2002; Young 1994b)
- Uninteresting curriculum (Fisher 2001; Kent 1996; McPake et al., 1999; Milton & Meara, 1998; Vasseur & Grandcolas, 1997)

Sociocultural influences

- Negative parental support (Barton 1997; Chambers 1998; Gardner 1991; Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993)
- The negative attitudes of friends and peers (Barton 1997; Bartram 2006; O'Reilly-Cavani & Birks, 1997)
- Negative experiences and perceptions of the target language community (Chambers 1999; Dornyei 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993)
- The role of English in the world (Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993; Watts 2003; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002)
- Undermining of foreign language learning by the media (McPake et al., 1999; Oskamp & Schultz, 2005; Watts 2003)
- Low perception of utility of languages (Clark & Trafford, 1995; Kent 1996; Lamb & Fisher, 1999; McPake et al., 1999; O'Reilly-Cavani & Birks, 1997)

Thus, from the preceding, it would be reasonable to conclude that the principal reason why tens of thousands of schoolchildren in the UK choose not to take up languages in later school life is because 'they do not see the point'. If we think carefully about this whole situation, the fact that students do not perceive the notion of language learning as anything other than a skill to be performed could be justified under the parameters of a cyclical, culturally produced process. This cycle would start in the school and would eventually reach educational authorities; hence, the top-down attitude of trivialising language learning (Tickle 2013). The process could be explained on the basis that students would later become adults: parents, friends and neighbours (even language teachers) who would continue to maintain the same undesirable perspectives developed in their school years (see NFER 1974, for a discussion); these adults, in turn, would

come to occupy positions of power that would allow them to make decisions that affect the education of the country.

To illustrate this state of affairs, I would like to refer to the last Government's consultation report for making foreign languages compulsory at Key Stage 2 (KS2) (DfE 2012). This government initiative involved 318 participants, amongst whom were students, parents, educators, and stakeholders. Table 2.1 below shows the proportions of respondents who agreed with the statements of question one of the consultation. This question tried to gather substantial explanations to justify the integration of foreign language learning across KS2:

Table 2.1: Headline findings in question one of the consultation

53%	Starting language learning at a young age is beneficial for learners because young children can assimilate languages more easily.
50%	Improving language capabilities enable learners to better understand our globalized world, the societies encompassing it and other people and their cultures.
34%	Learning a language enhances problem-solving skills that can be transferable to other areas of the curriculum.
23%	Earlier start to language learning will increase learners' competitiveness within an ever-growing internationalized employment market.

The preceding might suggest then that the majority of the respondents (spanning students and national bodies) show an unawareness of the key benefits that learning a language today might bring to learners. This is shown, by the relatively few respondents that foregrounded cultural, multi-literacy or economic values over the practical and pragmatic value of mastering a foreign language. In regard to the former, I would like to add that, expanding language learning to KS2 would not necessarily bring about mastery, and even less so motivation to learn. This is because successful (language) learning depends on qualitative factors rather than quantitative ones (see Hattie & Yates, 2013, for a discussion). To illustrate, the recent EU report Language Competences for

Employability, Mobility, and Growth (European Commission 2012) shows similar figures in learners who move past GCSEs with an intermediate level (B1/B2) in both the UK (9%) and France (14%), despite the fact that, in the latter, foreign language acquisition has been present in primary education for a few years now.

Returning to the report, it seems that one out of two respondents does not identify the acquisition of a global mindset as a reason to study foreign languages. The global awareness value of language learning, often referred to as intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997), can foster 'knowledge of self and other, attitudes of openness and curiosity, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness' (Schenker 2012: 50). To show its importance, developing global mindsets is a core element of the European Common Framework for Languages (as well as the ACTFL Guidelines in the United States) and a regular recipient of European funding. Proof of this is the European schemes, including Comenius, Euroscola or eTwinning. The underlying principle underpinning these initiatives is to provide learners with real-life communicative experiences with students in other countries (Drabble 2013).

In addition, approximately two out of three respondents do not attribute any importance to the fact that learning a foreign language is associated with acquiring useful transferable skills in order to face challenges, both within the school environment (other subjects), and beyond (the workplace). Language learning, as other academic subjects, allows students to acquire a series of valuable skills in tandem with the content knowledge. These are currently known as 21st century skills and are perceived to be: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving skills, creativity and innovation, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility (see P21.org). Thus, the acquisition

of these transferable skills is regarded as key to thriving in the workplace. As Warschauer (2011: 18) puts it:

> In an information-based economy, even entry-level office jobs require many things labelled as 21st century skills, such as being able to make use of a new technology to communicate and collaborate […] the greatest power, pay, and influence are reserved for those who have more than these basic skills, specifically those who also can carry out expert thinking and complex communication in particular domains.

Finally, the last datum indicates that learning a foreign language has yet another fundamental value, which maps back to the philosophy of 21st century education, and that seems to go widely undetected by approximately two out of three respondents, namely that of strengthening schoolchildren's competiveness in the global market. Competitiveness of the UK economy and successful global trade has been the focus of political attention over the last few years (ALL 2011). In recent research conducted by Foreman-Peck (2009) for the Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills, it was revealed that overreliance on English-speaking markets costs the UK economy around 48 billion pounds annually, which corresponds with 3.5% of the GDP (BIS 2014).

Similarly, in a British Chambers of Commerce survey administered in 2011 among 8,000 businesses, it was revealed that 61% of UK non-exporters consider language difficulties a barrier to trading internationally (Monagham 2012). Along the same lines, the annual CBI and Pearson Education and Skills Survey has, over the past five years, consistently reported (2010-2014) that employers are dissatisfied with the foreign language skills of the British workforce (CBI & Pearson, 2014). It is important to mention that the shortage of language skills seems to affect all sorts of occupational categories. This is confirmed by data from the latest UK Commission for Employment and Skills survey in which 91,279 establishments across the UK participated (UKCES 2014).

Given the aforementioned, it seems clear that schoolchildren are no longer the only ones that hold unfavourable attitudes towards foreign language learning. In all fairness,

agreeing with the views of the scholars cited above, we might well say that this thought seems rather engrained within the UK society. For this reason, I strongly believe that this specific scenario should become a matter of intervention on a national scale in order to achieve a change in attitudes across Britain that can lead to increased uptake of MFL in KS4 and beyond. To this end, in the following section I propose a possible course of action to reverse this vicious cycle that affects the current educational landscape of the UK, especially concerning foreign language acquisition.

2.3 Engaging Students in MFL

After ascribing the problem of low uptake of MFL in KS4 and beyond to the British society's low opinion of foreign languages, here I propose an action plan that may assist in increasing the status of foreign language learning among secondary schoolchildren. Thus, below I present my rationale for a classroom-based initiative that can contribute to raising student uptake of MFL in the UK at GCSE and A-levels. My plan consists of two combined courses of action, as shown in Figure 2.2.

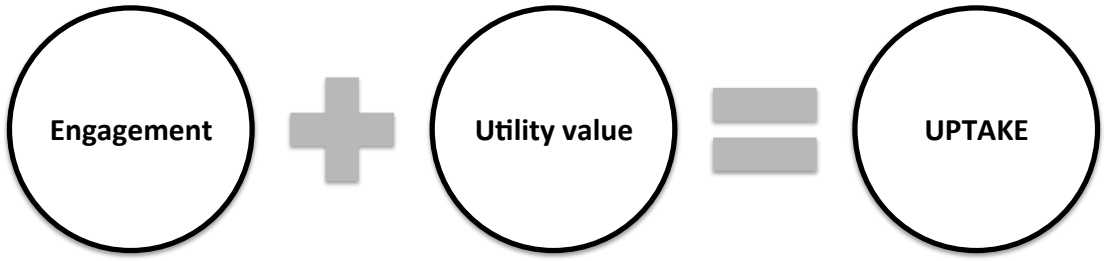

Figure 2.2: Classroom initiative to increase student uptake of MFL

The initiative is engineered for the classroom level for various reasons. First, it almost goes without saying that modifications are comparably easier to carry out at the classroom level than at the school-wide level (e.g., changing the institutional view on

MFL's value) where educational authorities or politics come into play (Pachler et al., 2007; Pachler et al., 2014). Secondly, and more importantly, there is evidence to support the view that any changes made to the nature of attitudes towards language learning are to a great extent mediated from the classroom (e.g., Chambers 1999; Clark & Trafford, 1995; Evans & Fisher, 2009; Fisher 2001; McPake et al., 1999; Nikolov 1998; Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993; Taylor & Marsden, 2012; Wright 1999). This apparently can be attributed to the fact that students' attitudes are largely shaped by their daily experiences in the classroom, as I will explain in later sections. Certainly, I do not wish to imply that classroom-based initiatives are always enough to transform students' attitudes — in fact, other factors such as the perception of languages within the school can have a significant impact on the success of such interventions (Evans & Fisher, 2009). Rather, my point is that classroom interventions are powerful enough to positively shape students' attitudes even when the odds (i.e., school support) are stacked against them.

Thus, regarding the first course of action in Figure 2.2, educational research evidences that student experiences of engagement or disengagement in a particular subject may play a significant role in how students perceive that subject. Notably, a factor common to most of the classroom interventions that have successfully improved student attitudes towards a certain subject is that they fostered student engagement with learning material as part of their equations. For example, Sesen and Tarhan (2013) found evidence in an urban public high school in Turkey (N=62) that the introduction of inquiry-based activities had positive effects on engagement, and in turn, on students' attitudes towards chemistry. These results were also found in a similar intervention conducted in Taiwan involving 68 high school students (Lin et al., 2014). In this study, the implementation of an instructional model based on inquiry had a dual positive effect on both engagement and the participants' attitudes to science. Furthermore, the results of an American intervention conducted by Houseal et al. (2014) showed that student engagement prompted by the provision of authentic experiences resulted in positive attitudes towards

science (N=193). This pattern is also visible in university contexts. Hodges and Kim (2013), for instance, found that enhancing engagement by means of a motivational model known as the ARCS model (Keller 1987) improved students' perceptions towards learning mathematics (N=42).

The message that these studies convey is also supported in foreign language learning research (e.g., Dörnyei 1998, 2003; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; McPake et al., 1999; Nikolov 1998) where it is commonly reported that student engagement, generally referred to as motivated behaviour, has the power to ultimately shape student attitudes towards the languages they learn in positive ways. This can be rationalised on the basis that attitudes towards a specific school subject are largely the result of cumulative experiences of engagement (or disengagement) with academic work (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). It can therefore be argued that engagement influences attitudes more than attitudes influence engagement. As Herrenkohl and Guerra (1998: 433) point out, "being engaged creates a sense of purpose and accomplishment among students and promotes the development of important 'dispositions' towards learning". Taking this into consideration, it is thus not surprising that student engagement has been recognised by several scholars as a crucial factor in defining whether students continue to study languages in KS4 (e.g., Evans & Fisher, 2009; Fisher 2001; McCrone et al., 2005). A case in point lies in the study conducted by Taylor and Marsden (2012) involving 498 Year 9 students from three maintained secondary schools in England. The results showed that students who felt engaged in their lessons were more likely to continue learning languages in KS4.

In light of the above, it can then be argued that everyday engagement experiences in a subject such as MFL may have considerable impact on how students feel about that particular subject. Indeed, the opposite situation would be a lack of engagement, engendering poor attitudes and ultimately leading to MFL attrition in KS4 (cf. Finn

1989), which seems to be today's reality in British schools (cf. 2.2). In this respect, the research of Gruneberg and Sykes (1994), in which 273 undergraduate students from non-language degrees participated, revealed that 55% of students did not enjoy MFL at school. Although this research is more than 20 years old, the current situation, which seems worse rather than better, implies that the picture found by Gruneberg and Sykes still persists, and that students are not sufficiently engaged in today's MFL classrooms.

From this perspective then, a possible conclusion might be that student engagement has a self-amplifying nature that eventually affects attitudes (Jang et al., 2012; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012) . Here is an illustrative example of the amplification effect in the sense that I describe it:

> The important point is that a person's appraisal of one level can easily be transferred to a broader or narrower level; for example, negative attitudes evoked by failure in doing a particular task can easily be generalised to the whole language course or to the whole of language learning ("I'm just not good at languages . . ."), and, conversely, established attitudes about the whole school can profoundly affect one's specific L2 learning disposition ("I dislike everything that's going on in this building"). (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998: 44)

That being said, it seems clear that a key course of action that should be taken in order to increase MFL uptake is to achieve a high degree of student engagement in the classroom. And this would be on the basis that (a) promoting student engagement is within the teachers' control and (b) it has consistently proved to be a powerful element to transform student attitudes.

However, as implied by Figure 2.2, I believe that student engagement, despite being necessary for the positive development of attitudes, would not sufficiently impact on the academic value students attach to MFL. That is, regularly providing students with engagement experiences could positively affect their attitudes to the end that they perceive MFL as enjoyable and exciting. Nevertheless, I contend that in the context of British statutory education, this would not be enough to instil a strong desire in students to embrace foreign languages in KS4 and beyond. In other words, even if students enjoy MFL, my intuition is that a very high percentage of them would most likely 'hold

themselves back' when it comes to pursuing MFL in KS4 because other superordinate interests take precedence, such as pursuing subjects that are more highly valued in society.

In view of this, prior research on MFL in British schools has suggested that the perceived usefulness of speaking a foreign language in future careers is another key driver that moves students to take up languages in KS4 (e.g., Evans & Fisher, 2009; Fisher 2001; McCrone et al., 2005). To illustrate, the study of Stables and Wikeley (1999) exploring student perceptions of the importance of MFL and their reasons for liking and disliking the subject (N=144) found that French and German were the most disliked subjects largely due to the fact that they were perceived unhelpful for improving employment prospects. These findings are echoed in the study of Young (1994a) where the author found a firm connection between student attitudes towards French and the low perception of its career value. As one of the participants puts it (Young 1994a:113):

> I don't like it… it's all right for the people that are going to take up a career like couriering or something like that and be a courier or an airline pilot, but not for the people who don't really want it … It's a waste of a lesson.

A survey carried out by Bartram (2010) a decade after Stables and Wikeley and Young's research presents the same views. Thus in a comparative study that looked at the precursors of student attitudes towards foreign language learning in public schools in England, Germany, and the Netherlands (N=408), the author found that the utility value of speaking foreign languages was the most important influencer of student attitudes. As he concludes in his study (Bartram 2010: 180):

> Looking at attitudes in general, the findings from these learners suggest that beliefs relating to language utility may be the most important factor directing their attitudes. Where these convictions are strong, learning attitudes seems to remain positive, even in the face of more negative competing influences such as the level of difficulty experienced, negative affective attitudes, negative micro-attitudes towards aspects of the learning experience, or indeed negative social perceptions.

Thus, drawing on the former volume of research, I propose that in order to increase MFL uptake, a high degree of student engagement is combined with the explicit

promotion of the employability value (i.e., utility value) of learning a foreign language. This can be understood as raising student awareness of the importance of MFL for their individual careers rather than just emphasising the general usefulness of speaking foreign languages in today's job market, which seems to be less powerful in terms of its potential impact on individual attitudes. Recent research from Pearson and Teach First involving over 8,000 adolescents in the UK has shown that young people are truly interested in learning about getting a job (Pearson & Teach First, 2013). Therefore, in this regard, placing the focus on personal employability seems to me an argument likely to gain traction amongst students and persuade them to continue their study of MFL post-14 and post-16. With this, of course, I do not mean that the utilitarian value of foreign language learning would need to be promoted at the expense of its humanistic advantages such as the development of personal, social and cultural skills, but rather that strong emphasis is placed on the employability value.

In this respect, I argue that in the specific context of mandatory schooling in Britain, teachers like me will face a dual challenge if we wish to have a robust impact on student attitudes towards language learning. The first challenge would be that of engaging students in the classroom, while the second one would consist of explicitly (and implicitly) promoting the occupational value of MFL. This action plan should meet the requirements to begin to push MFL higher up on the learning agenda of KS3 students.

Having said all this, although my desired aim was originally to engineer an intervention to achieve precisely the above, I soon realised that such a study would go beyond the scope of a PhD study. The main reason is that, when engaged in the research literature, I found a significant lacuna regarding models for fostering student engagement in school classrooms. Moreover, I also came across a multidisciplinary field of research (i.e., engagement research) in which work at the level of classroom engagement was still in the early stages. Thus, these rather surprising events made me reconsider the aims of my

PhD study. That is, in the absence of a satisfactory way to foster student engagement in classroom school contexts in engagement research, emphasis should first be placed on addressing this issue.

On the other hand, achieving my original plans would have entailed, first, designing a pedagogical model to promote student engagement in the classroom, and then assessing it in order to ascertain its potential. Second, in the case that the model worked as desired, I would then have to study the long-term impact of the implementation of such a model on student attitudes and further KS4/A-level uptake. I would, simultaneously, have to develop an instructional approach to make students see the utility value of foreign language learning. Once set in place, I would then have to infuse such an approach jointly with the model for engagement in order to investigate the effects of the dual intervention on student uptake of MFL in KS4/A-level. Undoubtedly, each one of these phases could be easily framed as an individual research study. Therefore, aiming to achieve all these targets in one PhD study would have been counterproductive from a quality, time, and space perspective.

Considering the abovementioned, this PhD study focuses exclusively on the first stage: that of developing and evaluating the effectiveness of a pedagogical model for fostering student engagement in the MFL classroom. Thus, in the following sections, I first put forward the existing state of affairs of engagement research in order to pave the way towards the proposal of a pedagogical model for student engagement. Second, I concentrate on the rationale underpinning the proposal of the ProE model to foster adolescent academic, social, emotional and cognitive engagement in learning activities.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Having recognised the facilitation of student engagement as one of the two classroom-based courses of action needed to begin to positively transform student attitudes towards MFL and, therefore, increase its uptake in future school stages, the following sections consider a possible solution to fostering student engagement.

I start in 3.2 by providing a definition of engagement for this study that harmonises with current research demands. For this, I first discuss the role of student engagement in current educational research, followed by an examination of a number of theoretical issues surrounding the study of the construct of engagement in modern times. In 3.3 I then focus on developing an approach to stimulate engagement in MFL contexts (i.e., learning activities). I conclude in 3.4 by presenting the ProE model for promoting student academic, social, emotional and cognitive engagement (ASEC engagement) with learning activities, and rationalising the project as the vehicle to embody the ProE model in this study.

3.2 Operationalising Engagement

Even though I approach engagement from the viewpoint of attitude development, I should emphasise that student engagement is generally studied from the perspective of other long-term outcomes, such as, achievement. Thus, prior research in the school context has shown that student engagement leads to better learning, better grades, greater achievement, academic resilience, and ultimately, positive youth development (see Fredricks 2014; Fredricks et al., 2004, for a discussion). Moreover, engagement has also been found to stave off failure (Jang et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2008), student

attrition (O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003), and ultimately, problematic conduct associated with early adolescence, such as substance abuse, unsafe sexual activity, or delinquency (Henry et al., 2012; Morrison et al., 2002; Neild et al., 2007). Furthermore, and especially regarding the objectives of this study, it has been shown that engagement can be facilitated through effective classroom practices (e.g., Malloy et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014). As Fredricks (2014: 39) states, it is possible to increase engagement when appropriate changes are made "to the instructional and social environments of the classrooms". As will be discussed later, this seems to be possible regardless of students' individual differences, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Unsurprisingly, the abovementioned situation has generated much interest among educational researchers, as the engagement construct seems to provide a possible antidote, not only to addressing problems of low levels of learning, achievement, and motivation, but also to improving the everyday and future lives of schoolchildren (see Fredricks 2014, for a discussion). Consequently, a large number of studies have been conducted seeking to understand this phenomenon as well as the factors that cause or diminish it. This situation, although beneficial at first sight, has unfortunately brought with it conceptual haziness within the field, as illustrated by the considerable number of conceptual issues that appear in the engagement literature (see Eccles & Wang, 2012; Martin 2012, for a discussion). Notable among these issues are:

a) The use of the terms motivation and engagement interchangeably
b) A broad use of the term engagement to indistinctly refer to any kind of engagement occurring at a school (e.g., engagement with learning activities, engagement with school activities)
c) A lack of clarity regarding what constitutes engagement

Given the aforementioned situation, several scholars have inevitably been tempted to call for a more rigorous conceptualisation of engagement in research studies in order to

overcome the shortcomings that the construct faces today (e.g., Eccles & Wang, 2012; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Reschly & Christenson, 2012). According to the authors, specific definitions of engagement, as opposed to inclusive definitions, would enable researchers to measure this construct with more precision. This in turn would lead to a better understanding of student engagement within school contexts and to better-designed interventions that would advance theoretical understanding. These arguments make a strong case for providing more specific understandings of engagement in research studies like the one at hand. It is for this reason that, in what follows, I address each one of the abovementioned conceptual issues with the aim of providing a demarcation of engagement for this research study that conforms to the definitional demands in current theory.

3.2.1 Establishing the Interaction between Motivation and Engagement

Arguably, current theory posits two main perspectives to understanding and investigating student engagement. The first perspective is inclusive: embracing the notion of motivation as a part of engagement (see Fredricks et al., 2004, for a discussion). Hence, researchers working under this paradigm often use the terms motivation and engagement interchangeably (e.g., Martin 2007; Youth & Studer, 2004). In contrast, the second perspective distances motivation from engagement (see Russell et al., 2005, for a discussion). Supporters of this thus see motivation as intent, while likening engagement to action. Put another way, they conceive motivation as the antecedent of engagement (e.g., Eccles & Wang, 2012; Newmann et al. 1992; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). To illustrate:

> [In a reading task] motivational aspects include (a) perceptions of reading competency, (b) the perceived value of reading in order to obtain larger goals (e.g., better grades, parent/teacher praise), and (c) the perceived ability to succeed at the reading task, among others [...] Engagement aspects include the number of words that were read of the amount of text that was comprehended with deeper processing of the content. (Appleton et al., 2006: 428)

This does not mean, however, that the relationship between motivation and engagement is unidirectional — in fact, recent studies on engagement reveal reciprocal relationships (e.g., Jang et al., 2012; Reeve & Lee, 2014) — but rather that motivational resources mediate the materialisation of engagement.

Having said that, many authors agree that the second perspective allows for a much richer characterisation of the concept of engagement (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a discussion). In one way or another they concur, I believe correctly, that this view is better suited to the exploration of the construct of engagement, essentially because it keeps motivation and engagement as distinct, albeit related constructs, which allows for a deeper exploration of student engagement. The first viewpoint, in my opinion (and that of others), although potentially useful at the general level of engagement analysis, seems to be problematic for a number of reasons. For instance, an all-encompassing conceptualisation of engagement from a research perspective does not seem suitable, as it would mix psychological or internal processes with active involvement in learning (Fredricks 2014). As Eccles and Wang (2012: 138) point out:

> If 'engagement' encompasses everything from feeling like one belongs in the school to doing one's homework, or to participation in the school band, then almost anything we do in schools can be seen as an intervention to increase engagement.

Another reason, is that maintaining that motivated students equals engaged students disregards the fact that students willing to engage in learning activities would eventually do so (Blumendfeld et al. 2006; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003); and more importantly that they would earnestly invest in their learning cognitively (Fredricks 2014). In this sense, as Appleton et al. (2006: 428) argue, "motivation is necessary, but not sufficient for engagement". Finally, using the term motivation to mean engagement may have the associated risk that researchers may tip their focus towards the affective side of student engagement (e.g., motivated behaviour), rather than exploring this construct from multiple interrelated angles, such as how students behave, feel, and think when engaged in schoolwork.

Taking this into consideration, I argue that studying engagement from the first perspective (i.e., no distinction between motivation and engagement) might further exacerbate the conceptual haziness associated with today's construct of engagement. It is for this reason that pursuant to mainstream engagement research (i.e., the second perspective), I conceptualise engagement in this research as a separate, although related construct, from motivation. Thus, motivation is conceived as the basis for subsequent engagement with schoolwork while engagement is understood as the outward manifestation of motivation (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

3.2.2 Focusing on a Domain of Student Engagement

As previously mentioned, one of the issues revolving around the conceptualisation of engagement is that engagement studies, at times, do not clearly demarcate the level of engagement at which they are working, or even if specified, this might be conceived in a rather open-ended way (Eccles & Wang, 2012; Harris 2011; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). The result of this may be, for example, that researchers investigating school engagement draw on studies conducted at the level of task engagement to explain their findings at the school level (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2012). In this line, Wang and her colleagues (Wang et al., 2014: 518) note:

> An important consideration in the measurement of engagement is the level at which the construct is measured. A seemingly identical construct can bear different meanings at different levels of generality. Engagement at the school level, for instance, is typically measured as bonding to school, participation in extracurricular activities, attendance, and number of referrals and suspensions. However, school engagement does not directly reflect classroom engagement. The same student may be highly engaged in one class, but not in others, and classrooms vary in average student engagement (Darr, 2012). Yet, many measures conflate classroom-level and school-level engagement.

In this sense, Skinner and Pitzer (2012) argue that engagement can occur on at least four nested levels as illustrated in the following Figure:

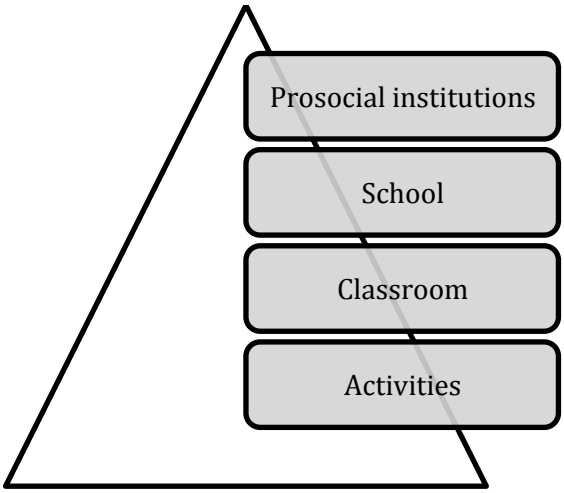

Figure 3.1: Levels of engagement according to Skinner and Pitzer (2012: 23)

At the top level, the authors identify engagement with the school as a *prosocial institution*. This type of engagement can be understood as the involvement of schoolchildren in the school's mission to foster positive behaviour. According to the authors, this level of engagement promotes positive youth development and also protects schoolchildren against risky behaviour and delinquency (see also Morrison et al., 2002). At the next level, there is engagement *with the school*, which refers to the involvement of students with the school as an institution. This level of engagement refers to active participation, not only in academic work, but also in other types of extracurricular activities such as sports, band, or student government. The authors assert that engagement with the school as an institution contributes to students completing their studies, making it a powerful protector against student attrition. It is worth stressing that this is a widely (if not the most) researched level of engagement (see Fredricks et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2003). At the next level, there is engagement *with the classroom*, which represents student involvement with the classroom; this is understood in terms of the teacher, peers, and the curriculum driving the classroom. This kind of engagement is thought to promote student achievement and protect against student failure at the classroom level. Finally, within this level of engagement, we find engagement *with learning activities*, which is defined as 'constructive, enthusiastic, willing, emotionally

positive, and cognitively focused participation with learning activities in school' (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012: 22).

Interestingly, it is the last level of engagement mentioned (from the classroom to learning activities) that the authors find most powerful in terms of its impact on engagement. One of the explanations they provide for this is that engagement with learning activities plays a crucial role in shaping daily school experiences, which when taken together can result in long-term outcomes, such as, for example, a shift in student attitudes. As the authors argue: "from episodes of effective coping may come the development of durable long-term motivational mindsets" (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012: 24).

In harmony with this, I focus specifically on this strand of engagement in my research. As stated earlier, conforming to the motivation research (e.g., Dörnyei 2003; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003), if my purpose ultimately is to positively transform the attitudes of KS3 schoolchildren towards MFL, my assertion is that I should do so daily, and in a gradual manner. In other words, this should be done 'bottom-up' (i.e., from the classroom) rather than 'top-down' (i.e., one-off or shock-therapy, national interventions to change attitudes). In this sense, intervening at the activity level seems to be an ideal approach to successfully shaping student attitudes. This does not mean however, that this level is key to developing positive mindsets while others, such as the classroom level, are not. In fact, experience has taught me that engaging activities thrive best in classroom environments that are supportive of student engagement. This is partly because, in order to engage, students need certain supports that require implementation beyond the simple learning activity and thus become an integral part of classroom pedagogy. For example, consider positive teacher-student relationships: the absence of which is detrimental to engagement, as several studies have demonstrated (e.g., Currie 2014; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Plenty et al., 2015; Skinner et al., 1998). Nevertheless, I

still find it useful to concentrate on engagement at the activity level in this particular study for two main reasons.

First, I believe that even though a supportive, engaging classroom environment may take precedence over the engaging activity, I feel that it would be still useful to explore the factors that make learning activities engaging. This is mainly because there is a shortage of empirical studies that look at engagement with learning activities (see Greene 2015; Harris 2011, for discussions). As mentioned earlier, it seems that engagement research has largely focused on school engagement. To illustrate, from the 11 self-report survey measures that Fredricks and McColskey (2012) analyse in a recent review of quantitative instruments previously used to measure student engagement, none of them focuses on the activity level. This can be partly explained by the fact that one of the (two) lines of research in which engagement research has originated is interested in the prevention of attrition and at-risk populations (see Finn & Zimmer, 2012, for review of this tradition). Hence, the focus on how students experience school as an institution. In view of this, I believe that focusing this study on engagement in learning activities would make an important contribution towards a better understanding of student engagement at the activity level.

Second, I opine that working at the level of the activity would allow us to learn about key enablers of engagement; knowledge that could then be applied to create classroom environments that support engagement. In other words, exploring what makes students engage in activities would provide valuable insights into the elements necessary for designing environments that foster student engagement. Possibly, it could then be a matter of transforming facilitators of engagement in learning activities into classroom principles to be embraced by teachers. In this sense, the results obtained in a study such as this one that focuses on engagement at the activity level would be an interesting

contribution the field of engagement research. I turn now to describe the dimensions that make up engagement in this study.

3.2.3 Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct

After establishing the level of engagement upon which this research study operates and demarcating its relationship with motivation, I will now direct my attention to another theoretical issue associated with the conceptualisation of engagement. There is a movement within current theory to avoid conceptualisations of engagement that study the construct at a general level (e.g., X increases engagement) (Christenson et al., 2012; Eccles & Wang, 2012). Accordingly, such conceptualisations are not very helpful if researchers hope to gain an insightful and detailed perspective on student engagement. In response to this theoretical demand, I conceptualise engagement in this study as a multidimensional construct encapsulating behaviour, emotion, and cognition. This coincides with the work of Fredricks and her colleagues (Fredricks et al., 2004) as well as Jimerson and his colleagues (Jimerson et al., 2003) who, after exploring definitions and measures related to school engagement in previous literature, conclude that student engagement is a multidimensional construct that encompasses affective, behavioural, and cognitive subtypes.

Thus, this view of engagement is prefaced on the idea that by examining student engagement in terms of students' actions, feelings, and thoughts, it is possible to obtain a relatively complete characterisation of engagement. It is noteworthy that this is the prevailing conceptualisation of engagement in current theory at the activity, classroom, and school levels, and has received considerable empirical support (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a discussion), which also justifies why I am more inclined towards this particular characterisation of engagement than others (e.g., Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012; Reeve & Tseng, 2011).

Having said that, while a great deal of scholarship endorses the former three-way characterisation of engagement, disagreement arises regarding what constitutes it (see Eccles & Wang, 2012; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). This holds true in works at any level of engagement, i.e., from school to activity level (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). To illustrate this diversity, according to Fredricks (2014: 15), each dimension of engagement is defined and researched in terms of the following angles:

Behavioural engagement: (a) prosocial behaviour (e.g., Finn 1993; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), (b) involvement in classroom learning (e.g., Battistich et al., 1997; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Connell et al., 1994; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), and (c) participation in school-based extracurricular activities (e.g., Finn & Rock, 1997)

Emotional engagement: (a) emotional reactions to the school (e.g., Connell et al., 1994; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) and the classroom (e.g., Reeve 2013; Skinner et al., 2009), (b) school belonging (e.g., Finn 1989; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Voelkl 1997), and (c) the value of activities (e.g., Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003) or school (e.g., Finn 1993; Voelkl 1997).

Cognitive engagement: (a) psychological investment in learning (e.g., Newmann et al., 1992; Wehlage et al., 1989) and (b) cognitive strategy use (e.g., Meece et al., 1988; Reeve 2013; Walker et al., 2006; Wolters 2004).

The situation is complicated even further by the number and nature of indicators (i.e., features that show how a dimension is manifested in practice) that each of these uses in its conceptualisations of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). For example, at the level of classroom engagement, Skinner and Pitzer (2012) classify attention, concentration, and focus under the umbrella of cognitive engagement, while Reeve and Lee (2013) feature these indicators in the category of

behavioural engagement. Furthermore, Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) consider value as a part of emotional engagement, whereas Skinner and Pitzer (2012), and Reeve and Lee (2013), do not include these components in either of the dimensions.

In this vein, deciding on the definitions and indicators for each dimension of engagement at the level of learning activities is a challenging task, especially when such diversity in conceptualisations abounds. For the purpose of this study then, I propose drawing upon principles of logic, clarity, and simplicity in order to embrace adequate definitions and indicators of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive level engagement at the activity level. In terms of the dimensions of engagement, my proposition would firstly adopt an appropriate line of inquiry for each dimension of engagement in the context of learning activities. For example, 'participation in school-based extracurricular activities' would not be a suitable match for behavioural engagement at the level of activities for obvious reasons. Secondly, I argue for choosing a line of inquiry that is easily recognisable in the classroom by teachers; those that are easier to understand, identify, and/or measure. This idea stems from the claim that motivation is a private, unobservable, psychological, neural, and biological process while engagement is publically observable behaviour (Reeve 2012: 151). In this respect, the strand 'cognitive strategy use' of cognitive engagement may be a challenging one to identify in contexts where the teacher is also a researcher. As Shamsini (2012: 54) concludes in her action research study:

> As a mental activity, cognitive engagement is very difficult to investigate, especially when the researcher is also the teacher. Asking learners about their cognitive strategies while and after doing activities was neither possible for me as a teacher, nor desirable. It would have negatively affected learners' cognitive engagement in future activities.

Focusing now on the selection of sound indicators of engagement, I suggest avoiding indicators that may give rise to confusion within a certain dimension of engagement. For example, some researchers consider attentiveness as a trait of cognition (e.g., Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Is a student looking out the window cognitively disengaged? Furthermore,

such indicators of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement should be the minimum number necessary to determine whether a particular dimension of engagement has been realised in a learning endeavour. In order to clarify this, the vast majority of engagement studies are quantitative in nature, both at the school and classroom levels (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, and Greene 2015, for a discussion). Consequently, they feature various indicators per dimension of engagement, which are then investigated by a set of questionnaire items. An example of this is found in Skinner et al. (2008: 769) where indicators of behavioural engagement alone include 'effort, attention, and persistence while initiating and participating in learning activities'. These indicators are then examined through the following questionnaire items:

a) I try hard to do well in school
b) In class, I work as hard as I can
c) When I am in class, I participate in class discussions
d) I pay attention in class
e) When I'm in class, I listen very carefully

From an analytical perspective, I believe that having a significant amount of indicators for a specific dimension can be problematic, especially in primarily qualitative, teacher-led studies — like the present (cf. 4.2). This is mainly because focusing on and researching numerous indicators of engagement would require extensive attention and dedication from the teacher. This is, ill advised. Thus, I opine that having a small number of easily identifiable indicators, rather than an ambitious list, would work best in the interests of the teacher. That is why I argue for the idea of choosing 'elementary' indicators for behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement that are sufficient to ascertain whether a certain dimension of engagement is achieved.

Finally, the indicators should also be applicable, to the maximum extent possible, to the variety of secondary school students, regardless of their gender, ability, and cultural and

social background. That is, they should, as far as possible, apply to the majority of students. I feel that this is a necessary aspect to consider, given that widely used indicators of student engagement include participation (behaviour), anxiety (emotion), or relating new material to previous knowledge (cognition), which, are highly dependent on aspects like cultural background (i.e., participation), personality (i.e., anxiety), and mental ability or skill (i.e., relating new material to previous knowledge).

In light of the above, my aim in presenting a pragmatic conceptualisation of engagement in learning activities is not to simply add another set of definitions to the existing voluminous list, rather to draw on multiple sources in order to propose a unifying view based on principles of logic, clarity, and simplicity. My hope is that this will be the first step towards regularising the conceptual understanding of engagement with learning activities, at least in teacher-led studies in school settings.

Therefore below, I propose the definitions of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement that I have adopted for the present study along with the elementary direct evidence (i.e., indicators) that I suggest need to be identified as evidence of a particular dimension of engagement (Table 3.1). To define each dimension of engagement, I have followed the criteria discussed above, adhering to conceptualisations that are both suitable for the level of learning activities that are easily identifiable by teachers in the classroom. Moreover, to determine the basic indicators that characterise each dimension of engagement, cognizant of the relevant literature, I have drawn heavily from the responses of **265 schoolteachers** who completed an open-ended questionnaire in which they were invited to define student behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement in their own terms (see Appendix A, for a description of the questionnaire and a brief account of the analysis conducted). There is both a theoretical and practical reason for adopting such a course of action. From a theoretical perspective, the majority of indicators of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement used in research studies

come from theoretical postulations that are consistent across the literature (e.g., Fredricks et al., 2004) rather than from extensive observation of the most frequent ways in which students engage with learning material. A notable exemption to this is the work by Reeve and his colleagues (Reeve 2013; Reeve & Tseng, 2011) who used a large amount of field notes from trained teachers in order to define agentic engagement and determine its indicators. However, it is not clear if they did the same to establish the indicators of the other dimensions of engagement. From a practical and closely related viewpoint, I propose that schoolteachers are in the best position to describe what student engagement in learning activities looks like in the classroom (Reeve & Lee, 2014). Hence, the following are my definitions of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement:

Behavioural engagement

Drawing on the work of Finn and his colleagues concerning school engagement, I conceptualise behavioural engagement as observable behaviour both in relation to positive academic and social conduct (Finn 1989, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Finn et al., 1995). Such conduct is referred to in this study as *academic engagement* and *social engagement* in line with Appleton and colleagues' characterisation of engagement subtypes (Appleton et al., 2006; Christenson et al., 2008). The reason for dividing behavioural engagement into two comes from the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire. These results show that teachers understand behavioural engagement in terms of two major variables: good behaviour and on-task behaviour (see Appendix A).

Therefore, I believe that the former conceptualisation of behavioural engagement, which seems to cover two strands of thinking from Fredricks' list (i.e., positive conduct and involvement in classroom learning), is ideally suited for this dimension of engagement because it works well in the domain of learning activities and can also be easily seen by

the teacher in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, the 'participation in school-based extracurricular activities' strand holds little relation to the activities domain.

Furthermore, based on my analysis of the engagement literature, and above all, the teachers' responses to the open-ended questionnaire, I consider direct evidence of positive academic behaviour to be *focused on the activity* in the sense of doing what one is supposed to (i.e., academic engagement). In the case of individual work, focus on the activity means that the student is silently working, whereas in the case of group or peer work, students effectively work (i.e., focus) with their peers (e.g., having on-topic rather than off-topic conversations, all students participating, etc.). On the other hand, I understand that *behaving in line with classroom and school social norms and protocols* (e.g., compliance with teacher's requests, respect for teachers and other students, or appropriate body language) is evidence of positive social conduct (i.e., social engagement). To the best of my knowledge, the indicators of behavioural engagement presented above meet the criteria that were specified earlier. That is, they are a legitimate representation of the dimension, observable in nature, applicable to most secondary school students.

Emotional engagement

Similarly, at the level of the learning activities, the strand of *emotional reactions* seems to be the most logical match for emotional engagement in learning activities (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). This is based on the simple proposition that when I think (as a teacher) of students' emotional connection to a learning activity, the immediate image that comes to mind is a student experiencing high and/or low emotions prompted by the activity, which signal the extent to which he or she is engaged. The idea of *belonging* and *value*, would represent the aforementioned emotional connection to an activity to a lesser extent (i.e., poor representatives of the dimension), as they refer to specific concepts.

Alternatively, the elementary indicator I propose for emotional engagement in learning activities is *happiness*, which I understand as 'feeling pleasure or contentment' (OED 2002). This conclusion stems from the teachers' responses to the open-ended questionnaire, as well as research on emotions, particularly the work of Paul Ekman (Ekman 1971; Ekman & Friesen, 2003). Based on his groundbreaking research on facial expressions, the psychologist concludes that every individual experiences six basic universal emotions. These are: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise. Recent scientific developments (i.e., Jack et al., 2014) have further narrowed these emotions to four: happiness, sadness, fear/surprise, and disgust/anger. From the four basic emotions, I believe that *happiness* would be the best candidate for emotional engagement in learning activities due to it being the most positive emotion of the four, and also the one that most teachers endorsed in their questionnaire responses (see Appendix A). I believe that the *happiness* indicator fulfils the criteria specified above of the best representation of the dimension, visible to the teacher (although less than others due to its internal nature, one may argue), and applicable to most students.

Cognitive engagement

Finally, cognitive engagement, as the name suggests, is the dimension associated with student thinking (Blumendfeld et al., 2006; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Walker et al., 2006). If we are to identify and evaluate student thinking in learning activities between the two strands of research shown above, perhaps the most tangible variable of such thinking is the *psychological investment* that the student puts into a given activity. This is due to the fact that the mental effort students put into the activity can be reasonably inferred from their performance, as research suggests (e.g., Lee & Anderson, 1993; Lee & Brophy, 1996). In contrast, cognitive strategy use (e.g., guessing meaning from context, using imagery for memorisation) may be more difficult to identify, since mind processes may not be necessarily represented in what students produce. Additionally,

this line of thinking seems like a somewhat more contaminated conceptualisation of cognition because the use of cognitive strategies may not be inherent in every student (see Oxford 1990, for a discussion). Consequently, adopting this strand of thinking would not be appropriate to explore the cognitive engagement of every student in the classroom, but only of those who have developed cognitive strategies over time.

On this basis, it seems to me that following the 'psychological investment in learning' strand is the most logical decision, as it best converges with the criteria specified above (i.e., observable and adequate at the level of activities). Thus, agreeing with Newmann et al. (1992: 12) and others working along the same lines (e.g., Wehlage et al., 1989), in this study, cognitive engagement refers to the 'student's psychological investment in and effort directed towards learning, understanding, mastering the knowledge, skills or crafts that the academic work [learning activity] is intended to promote.' In other words, I define cognitive engagement with learning activities as attempting an activity and/or making the mental effort required to complete it.

Moreover, upon examination of the research literature (see above) and, in particular, considering the answers provided by the surveyed schoolteachers, I propose *effort to develop the activity* as the basic, observable indicator of cognitive engagement in learning activities. To expand on this, students who make an effort to develop activities will exert mental effort appropriate to their level of ability in order to accomplish the aims of the learning activity (e.g., conjugate verbs or complete a project). This is shown in the quality of the work that the student produces across the activity according to their academic capabilities.

In addition, it is frequently claimed that the three dimensions of engagement, understood more or less in the terms described above, are interrelated, reciprocal, and open-ended (Christenson et al., 2012; Ladd & Dinella, 2009; Li & Lerner, 2012; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Skinner et al., 2008). This would mean that, for example: a) emotionally

engaged students are likely to also be behaviourally engaged in the classroom as a result of developing positive emotions (interrelated); b) these positive emotions internally feed back into their classroom behaviour (reciprocal); and c) neither emotional nor behavioural engagement starts or ends the other, rather they are an on-going, mutually developmental process (open-ended). Although a number of studies show that these connections amongst dimensions of engagement actually exist, the truth is that our understanding of them remains very limited (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a discussion), especially when it comes to the relationship between the cognitive dimension of engagement and the other two (Appleton et al., 2006; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Walker et al., 2006).

What is clear is that whether related or not, according to this paradigm of engagement, we should not talk about full engagement unless the three — and in our case, four — dimensions are present in students (Fredricks et al., 2004). This condition should be observed for two reasons. Firstly, agreeing with Finn and Zimmer (2012: 124), each dimension "plays a different role in supporting academic outcomes, and each, if weak or lacking, contributes to academic or behaviour problems or early school leaving". In the opinion of this author just cited and that of others (e.g., Harbour et al., 2015; Wang & Holcombe, 2010), the three dimensions of engagement are thus intertwined with one another and together constitute a dynamic process that positively affects student learning and achievement and future school performance. Secondly, at the activity level, engagement requires more of students than focusing on the activity (i.e., behavioural engagement), and possibly more than experiencing pleasant emotions or showing pleasure or contentment (i.e., emotional engagement). This is because students may be behaviourally and/or emotionally invested in the activity without actually exerting the mental effort that the activity requires (Blumendfeld et al., 2006; Fredricks 2014). As Parsons et al. describe (2014: 24):

> Actively participating in academic work may well be an intuitive way to think about student engagement, but how many times have you seen students who have the uncanny ability to look busy without really accomplishing anything? How often have you observed students dutifully complete the tasks you assign without applying deep thought? Or, in the case of [teacher name], have you ever been in classrooms where students are intimidated into on-task behavior? Students in these classrooms may be observed as being on task, but they're far from demonstrating strategic consideration of content or an enthusiastic desire to learn.

According to this view, I argue that within the confines of this study, an engaged student is one whose behaviour during the activity represents proper conduct at both the academic and social level (i.e., academic and social engagement), one who is emotionally invested throughout the course of a given activity (i.e., emotional engagement), and finally, one who also engages with a learning activity 'minds-on' rather than 'minds-off,' thereby attempting to and/or exerting the mental effort necessary to accomplish the activity (i.e., cognitive engagement).

Thus, having clearly demarcated the notion of engagement in this study, I now shift my attention towards providing a practical solution to foster student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement (ASEC engagement) with learning activities that is valid for secondary school contexts.

Table 3.1: Dimensions and elementary indicators of ASEC engagement in learning activities

Dimensions	Operational definitions	Elementary indicators of AEC engagement in learning activities	
Academic	Positive academic conduct in the learning activity	• Concentration on the activity	Individual work: Silently focused on the activity
			Group work or peer work: Effectively (i.e., focused) working with peers
Social	Positive social conduct in the learning activity	• Behaviour according to social classroom and school norms	
Emotional	Positive emotional reactions to the learning activity	• Happiness	
Cognitive	Psychological investment in the learning activity	• Effort to do the activity	

3.3 An Approach to Foster Student ASEC Engagement

As mentioned earlier, this PhD study focuses on the engagement aspect of the proposed two-fold model to increase student uptake of MFL in KS4 and beyond (Figure 2.2). Considering this, engagement research has progressed considerably from the eighties when it emerged in educational research. Hence, today there is an ample volume of work that explains to a large extent what we can do in order to get schoolchildren engaged in the classroom (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a comprehensive review).

Nevertheless, as one can imagine, the equation is not simple. Thus, there are many variables that contribute to shaping student engagement, both within and beyond the control of the schools. Consider for example, school factors: aspects such as student individual characteristics, task characteristics, and instructional and social supports in the classroom are deemed to affect student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Perry et al., 2006). Concerning factors beyond the school, research shows that student engagement is shaped by influences including socioeconomic status or demographic variables such as ethnicity or gender (Christenson et al., 2012).

In view of this, one can argue that fostering student engagement in the classroom is virtually impossible since engagement with academic work depends on many interconnected spheres of influence surrounding the individual student that are sometimes beyond our control. Nevertheless, thanks to the research conducted to date in this topic, I believe that it is possible to devise a practical solution to this complex question. It all seems to come down to making sense of the data available on what makes students engage, using it to our advantage to engineer an action plan that can be easily applied in the classroom. Allow me to rationalise this through three steps:

1. Schools can shape engagement
2. Learning activities as the key facilitators of engagement

3. Making learning activities engaging

3.3.1 Schools Can Shape Engagement

There is research evidence that suggests that factors external to the school determine student engagement in the classroom. These factors include, amongst others, personality and individual differences, socio-economic status, ethnicity and/or gender (see Yazzie-Mintz 2007, for a discussion). To illustrate, regarding individual differences, in a recent study Kovas and her colleagues showed strong genetic influences on student motivation to learn (Kovas et al., 2015). In their study in which 13,000 twins aged 9–16 from 6 countries participated, the authors found that enjoyment and perceived ability were the same among twins that attended different classes. These results concur with others that show the relevance of genetic influence on student engagement (Olson et al., 2014; Spinath et al., 2008). On another note, in their study of 205 Euro-American families using 19 years of longitudinal data, Garnier et al. (1997) found that the socioeconomic status of the families predicted their children's school performance and engagement, as well as other long-term outcomes such as child stress, substance abuse and, ultimately, school attrition. Similar results have been reported in Coley (2002) Aikens and Barbarin (2008), and Palardy (2008). Ethnicity has been also been correlated with student engagement in the classroom (see Bingham & Okagaki, 2012, for a discussion). For example, findings from a large scale American study involving 17,000 high school students showed that African-American students were less engaged in school than Caucasian students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). Additional support for this interpretation is found in Connell et al. (1994) and Sigh et al. (2010). Finally, as far as gender is concerned, gender differences in student engagement and academic performance in school have also been reported in several studies (e.g., Diniz et al., 2014; Houtte 2004). For example, in an Australian study that followed 1265 individuals from birth to age 25, the researchers found that females obtained better grades than males on

standardised tests and accomplished more school and post-school qualifications (Gibb et al., 2008).

According to the aforementioned studies, one can think that there is little that schools or teachers can do to foster classroom engagement, as it seems that it may already be determined by given factors. Nevertheless, at the other end of the spectrum there is an extensive body of literature that challenges this view (e.g., Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Church et al., 2001; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Urdan & Midgley, 2003). Such studies show that the school and, in particular, the classroom plays a much more decisive role in shaping student engagement. In other words, they posit that engagement can be fostered regardless of individual differences, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and gender, because of the environmental influences that socio-biological characteristics are submitted to in educational contexts.

To illustrate, focusing on individual differences, in a recent study Lee (2014) studied the PISA 2009 international data set seeking to understand the universal factors of student achievement of top-performing countries (N= 78,353). After examining student data the authors conclude that what motivates student learning is invariant across countries. This finding suggests that, even if students are different, they can all be engaged in the classroom given the right conditions. Regarding ethnicity, Byrnes (2003) found in a study concerning almost ten thousand American students aged 17-18 that, when placed in an engaging environment, ethnicity interferes minimally with student engagement and achievement. This finding aligns with those of other studies such as Lepper et al. (2005) also conducted on American soil. In terms of gender, Steinmayr and Spinath (2008) in a German study involving 342 students aged around sixteen, found that the link between motivation and school achievement was not stronger from one gender to another. In another study, conducted at an international level with 3420 participants, Lam et al. (2012) discovered that, on the whole, gender does not influence student engagement

when certain social supports are in place, especially the teacher. Finally, regarding the student's socioeconomic status, in a study on family structure involving nearly half a million Californian adolescents aged 14-18, O'Malley et al. (2015) conclude that a positive school climate rather than the student's socioeconomic background (i.e., two-parent/single-parent household, in foster-care/homeless), is the main factor in student achievement. Furthermore, from a neuroscience perspective, challenging the empirically validated premise that schoolchildren from disadvantaged backgrounds are more cognitively immature than their counterparts and that little can be done about it, Gamino et al. (2014) show in a study conducted with more than 900 students aged 12-14 that cognitive gains are possible when specific training is provided.

Thus, considering the aggregate results of these studies, it is reasonable to conclude that student engagement can be fostered in the school context and particularly in the classroom, despite the students' socio-biological characteristics, especially regarding personal or individual differences, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. This is a point that has been made in similar terms by leading academics both in the field of motivation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000) and engagement research (e.g., Christenson et al., 2008; Reeve 2012).

3.3.2 Learning Activities as the Key Facilitator of Engagement within the School

Having concluded that engagement can be fostered at the school/classroom level regardless of the innate characteristics of the students, we are one step closer to reaching a solution to how to promote student engagement in (MFL) school settings. That being said, engagement research shows that within the school environment there are multiple influences that can shape student engagement in the classroom. These can be divided into influences that are directly related to teacher and those that are not.

Starting with influences that are not dependent on the teacher alone, *school size*, for example, has been regarded as an antecedent of classroom engagement. Thus, results of studies confirm that students in small schools are more likely to be engaged in the classroom partly because in such schools students tend to perceive themselves as valuable members of a community (e.g., Barker & Gump, 1964; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1993, 1995). As Fredricks et al. (2004: 73) note, "communal structures encourage shared responsibility and commitment to common goals, lateral decision making, and greater individual discretion". Connected to this, *classroom size* has also been reported as being an influencer of engagement (e.g., Krassel & Heinesen, 2014). In a recent study in which 686 students from Year 3 to Year 10 were observed, Blatchford and his colleagues (Blatchford et al., 2008) found that low-achievers were twice as likely to switch off from tasks in classes of 30 than in classes of 15. Another factor that has been studied in relation to school engagement is *disciplinary practices*. Thus, it seems that an emphasis on discipline by the school can be correlated with student behavioural engagement (e.g. Natriello 1984). However, results for this assumption are not conclusive, as other studies have shown that rigid rules have little effect on student engagement (e.g., Finn & Voelkl, 1993). Additionally, *classroom design* has also been found to affect student engagement. A recent analysis of 153 classrooms in 27 UK schools has revealed that factors including light, temperature, air quality, colour, complexity, ownership, and flexibility play a significant role in students' willingness to engage in schoolwork (Barret et al., 2015). Interestingly, among the students assessed these elements seemed to account for approximately 16% of their academic achievement.

Focusing now on those influences that the teacher can control, it has been well-documented in both motivation and engagement research that the nature of instruction plays a decisive role in classroom engagement (e.g., Blumenfeld & Meece, 1988; Dörnyei 2001; Fredricks et al., 2004; Blumenfeld et al. 2002; Keller 1987; Marks 2000).

And regarding instruction, as mentioned earlier in 3.2.2, the type of learning activities that teachers conduct in the classroom to bring about, or create conditions for learning, seem to be central to fostering student engagement (Parsons et al., 2014; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). This can be explained on the basis that learning activities are the basic structural unit of classroom planning and action (Clark & Yinger, 1977). Therefore, ensuring their effective implementation directly facilitates the creation of an engaging classroom environment (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). That is, influences beyond the teacher's control such as the ones cited above (e.g., class size) might have an effect on the degree to which students engage; nevertheless, it is reasonable to believe that what the teacher does in the classroom, and in particular, the nature of schoolwork itself is a far more powerful influencer of student engagement (see Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, for a discussion). Furthermore, as discussed in 3.2.2, task characteristics, not only account for subsequent engagement but also contribute to developing dispositions towards learning. As Dörnyei puts it (2003: 14):

> […] The quality of the activities used in language classes and the way these activities are presented and administered make an enormous difference in students' attitudes toward learning.

Accordingly, it might be concluded that if we were seeking to foster student engagement in the classroom, especially with the aim of positively shaping attitudes towards MFL, making learning activities as engaging as possible would be a good starting point. This is because, on the one hand, learning activities is a school factor that is under the teacher's control. On the other hand, and most importantly, learning activities seem to have the strongest influence on classroom engagement.

3.3.3 Making Learning Activities Engaging

Focusing now on the third step towards how to promote student engagement, the literature concerning activity design and engagement is vast, with almost as many variables emerging concerning how to make activities engaging (e.g., goal orientation,

collaboration, formative assessment, etc.) as how to foster engagement in general (see Belland et al. 2013, for an extensive list). In this respect, one can argue that designing learning activities that engage students poses a new challenge for which there is no easy solution. The truth is that years of research on both motivation and engagement have contributed enormously to this particular issue. Consequently, today, amid the myriad elements included in learning activities that possibly offer opportunities for engagement, we can identify some principles that appear to be most effective in fostering student ASEC engagement amongst secondary school students. Such principles revolve around *meaningfulness*, *autonomy*, *belongingness*, and *competence*. Briefly, in a broader sense, meaningfulness refers to the feeling that something is worth the time or effort, or viewed as valuable or important; autonomy refers to feeling freedom from external controls or influences; belongingness refers to feeling connected to other human beings; finally, competence refers to feeling the ability to do something successfully or efficiently (OED 2002).

The proposal of these four elements, I should mention, stems from my extensive, personal and professional reading of educational and psychology research. This mostly consisted of a rigorous review of peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters that dealt with the issue of student engagement with academic work, in secondary school settings. The works were found in online databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC (ProQuest), Web of Science, PsychINFO, and Education Full Text (EBSCO) and in reference lists within those articles. Having said that, I did not conduct a systematic review of literature to select the aforementioned four elements (see Evans & Benefield, 2001, for a description of key features of a systematic review of literature). Such an undertaking, would have interfered with the space and time limitations provided to complete this particular PhD research study. Therefore, this selection should be exclusively seen as my unique (though informed) viewpoint concurrent with the engagement literature regarding what seems to engage students academically, socially,

emotionally and cognitively in learning activities. Moreover, this selection has been made considering the fewest possible distinct consensual elements, based on their recurrence in educational and psychology research. This should thus result in a solution to fostering engagement that has realistic and doable application in the classroom since there are fewer elements to pay attention to when designing learning activities.

Returning to the main discussion, the effectiveness of meaningfulness, autonomy, competence, and belongingness for engaging students academically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively in learning activities can be explained on the basis of several supporting arguments, which are elaborated on below.

Argument #1: Developmental needs of adolescents

The first argument that supports the potential of meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence for ASEC engagement is that these elements are considered key developmental needs of adolescents (Dorman 1985; Scales 1991). In practical terms, this means that adolescents are more likely to be drawn to learning activities that support these needs than those that do not, simply because they are in accordance with their growth and development (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Thus, drawing on the work of The Center for Early Adolescence, reviewed in Scales (1991: 13-14), meaningfulness would correspond with the developmental need for meaningful participation in families, schools, and communities. This reads as follows:

> Young adolescents are intensely curious about the world around them, so they require exposure to situations in which they can use their skills to solve real-life problems. Young adolescents need to participate in the activities that shape their lives.

Autonomy, on the hand, would coincide with the developmental need for structure and clear limits:

> Clear expectations are crucial to unsure, self-critical young people. Explicit boundaries help define the areas in which they may legitimately seek freedom to explore. In their search for independence and autonomy, young adolescents often feel immune to risks and dangers, so they

> require structure and guidance in setting clear limits that involve them in the process of decision making.

Next, belongingness would be associated with the need for positive social interaction with adults and peers:

> Young adolescents identify with their peer groups' values and desperately want to belong, so they require opportunities to form positive peer relationships. Although they may not often admit it, they have a similar need for caring relationships with adults who like and respect them and who serve as role models and advisors.

Finally, competence would be matched to the need for competence and achievement:

> Young adolescents also need to find out what they are good at doing. They can be painfully self-conscious and self-critical and are vulnerable to bouts of low self-esteem, so they require many varied opportunities to be successful and have their accomplishments recognized by others.

Argument #2: Psychological human needs

The second reason that supports the effectiveness of meaningfulness, autonomy, competence and belongingness for ASEC engagement is that they are also considered inherent psychological human needs (see Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b, for a discussion). Thus, according to this line of research (known as Self-determination theory research and for which there is extensive empirical evidence available) every individual possesses certain psychological needs regardless of their age and socio-biological background. First, there is a need to feel autonomous and free from external controls (autonomy). Second, there is a need to feel competent (competence). Finally, there is a need to be connected to other human beings (relatedness or belongingness in our case). In the particular case of meaningfulness, although it is not featured as one of the psychological needs, it is however regarded as a common theme (see Turner et al., 2014), frequently referred to as curiosity, thus supporting its relevance in this respect.

That being said, research working in this paradigm supports that the extent to which the former psychological needs are fostered in the classroom determines the quality of student engagement in schoolwork. In contrast, the lack of support for any of these

needs is also regarded as negatively impacting on student engagement (Niemiec et al., 2009; Reeve 2012; Reeve & Halusic, 2009).

Argument #3: Constructs of major motivation theories

The third reason why I consider meaningfulness, autonomy, competence and belongingness as key promoters of ASEC engagement is because they are principal constructs in several major theories and sub-theories of motivation, for which a large volume of empirical research demonstrating their potential for engagement is available. Meaningfulness, for instance, is a core element in expectancy-value theory (Brophy 1999; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and in interest theory (Hidi 1990; Schiefele 1991). Autonomy is an integral element in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b) as well as in attribution theory (Weiner 1986). Competence is an essential element in social learning theory (Bandura 1977), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b), goal-setting theory (Latham 1990), goal orientation theory (Ames 1992), self-worth theory (Covington 1992), and self-theories (Dweck 2000). Finally, belongingness is found in general social psychology (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and is also a central element in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Argument #4: Correlated to ASEC engagement

The final reason justifying the suitability of fostering meaningfulness, autonomy, competence and belongingness to promote student ASEC engagement is because these constructs have been correlated in one way or another with ASEC engagement (as I understand it) in engagement research.

Starting with *meaningfulness*, prior studies have demonstrated that when students find schoolwork to have meaning in their lives, they engage at multiple levels. For example, concerning academic and social engagement, Marks (2000) found a relationship

between authentic instructional work and student concentration and good academic behaviour in a study including 3369 students from different elementary, secondary, and high schools in America. In this study it was also found that perceptions of the opportunities to be involved in authentic instruction were a strong predictor of joyful learning (i.e., emotional engagement). Similarly, a study of Chen et al. (1999) involving 674 high school students revealed that activities perceived as interesting were a significant predictor of enjoyment. Further evidence of this relationship can be found in the studies of Flowerday et al. (2004) and Sun and Rueda (2012). Finally, regarding cognitive engagement, in their observation of secondary school students over two years (N=24), Helme and Clarke (2001) found that linguistic indicators of cognitive and metacognitive activity, including verbalisation of thinking, questions, explanations, and other types of communication improved when activities were perceived as personally meaningful. In a more recent study conducted in a high school setting (N=220), Greene et al. (2004) found that that perceiving schoolwork as important for future success made students put forth mental effort to develop learning activities.

Moving to *autonomy*, evidence has consistently shown that environments that actively involve students in the learning process are associated with ASEC engagement. To illustrate, Reeve and his colleagues (Reeve et al., 2004) found in a study that observed 20 schoolteachers in action that the more teachers used autonomy-supportive instructional behaviours (e.g., giving choice, using non-controlling behaviours, etc.) the more academic, social, and emotional engagement their students achieved. Similar results have been observed for these types of engagement in Skinner et al. (2008) and Reeve and Lee (2013). On the other hand, studies such as that of Turner (1995) and Perry (1998) have demonstrated that schoolchildren perform more strategically and persist longer in the face of challenges (i.e., cognitive engagement) when they are offered choices about the direction of their learning. Other studies on the side of controlling behaviours have also shown that authoritarian communication styles in their

classrooms negatively affect the amount of mental effort that students put into learning activities (e.g., Deci et al., 1993; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

Addressing *belongingness* now, there is also research evidence that confirms that when students establish close relationships with both their peers and teacher, their ASEC engagement increases as a result (see Martin & Dowson, 2009, for a discussion). To illustrate, in a recent study conducted in Sweden in which 3,652 students participated (ages 14-15) Plenty et al. (2015) showed that students who experience social support from teachers and classmates are expected to display caring, sharing, and cooperative behaviours. Similarly, the findings of studies such as Wentzel and Asher (1995) involving 423 schoolchildren (ages 11-13), suggest that when students feel accepted rather than rejected by their peers they become more self-regulated learners and more prosocial and compliant. Other studies such as Goodenow (1993) including 353 participants (ages 10-14) have shown that when students are liked, respected, and valued by fellow students and their teachers, their academic motivation, effort, and achievement are positively affected. Wentzel et al. (2004) found in a two-year longitudinal study (N=242) that students with friends showed higher levels of prosocial behaviour, academic achievement, and emotional engagement than those without friends. On another note, in a study in which 641 schoolchildren (ages 8-13) were surveyed, Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that feelings of belongingness to peers and teachers determined general engagement and made unique contributions to student enjoyment. Actually, in this study belongingness to the teacher seemed to be the strongest influencer on emotional engagement apart from peers and parents. As the authors (Furrer & Skinner 2003: 159) conclude:

> Emotional engagement, although uniquely predicted by relatedness to all three specific social partners, seemed to depend most heavily on relatedness to teachers. Children who felt appreciated by teachers were more likely to report that involvement in academic activities was interesting and fun and that they felt happy and comfortable in the classroom. In contrast, children who felt unimportant or ignored by teachers reported more boredom, unhappiness, and anger while participating in learning activities.

In harmony with the above, is the collaborative and cooperative learning research, which has repeatedly reported that social learning promotes ASEC engagement partly due to feelings of belonging (see Slavin 1991 and Slavin 1996, for discussions). Considering the aggregate of these findings, it can be argued that feeling connected to peers and teachers (as well as other adults, like parents) is likely to have a positive impact on student concentration (i.e., academic engagement), on classroom behaviour (i.e., social engagement), on student happiness (i.e., emotional engagement), and on student effort to do schoolwork (i.e., cognitive engagement).

Finally, in terms of *competence*, engagement researchers have also found positive associations between perceived competence in carrying out learning activities and student ASEC engagement. For instance, regarding academic and social engagement, studies such as Skinner et al. (1990), Connell et al. (1994), and Rudolph et al. (2001), have demonstrated that perceived academic competence brings about on-task behaviour and positive conduct. The former studies have also shown a relationship between competence and emotional engagement. For example, Skinner and her colleagues, (Skinner et al., 1998) in a longitudinal study involving 1600 subjects aged 8-13, reported that control beliefs were associated with active engagement in the classroom at both the behavioural and emotional levels. Studies on the area of learned helplessness (i.e., students' beliefs that they cannot do well no matter what they do) provide further evidence that students who perceive themselves as competent enough to accomplish a task are low in learned helplessness, and therefore more willing to participate and less likely to switch off from their learning (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Regarding emotional engagement, the work of Harter (1992) has shown that perceptions of competence correlate with positive emotional reactions to schoolwork. Her findings also illustrate that students with low levels of competence are more likely to feel anxious or depressed. These findings concur with similar studies conducted in school contexts (e.g., Bandura et al., 1996; Meece et al.,

1990; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Lastly, research also suggests a significant influence of competence on cognitive engagement (e.g., Pintrich 1999; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Walker et al., 2006; Wolters & Pintrich, 1998; Wolters et al., 1996). As an example, in a meta-analytic investigation focusing across all levels of education Multon et al. (1991) concluded that competence beliefs represented 14% of academic performance (e.g., standardized achievement tests) and approximately 12% of the variance in the academic persistence of students (e.g., time spend on task, number of tasks attempted or completed and the number of academic terms completed). These results indicate that students exert more mental effort when they believe that the schoolwork is within their level of competence (i.e., cognitive engagement).

Concluding remarks

In view of the above, it can thus be argued that it is possible to expect to engage students academically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively in learning activities by simultaneously attending to the principles of meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence when designing such activities. This proposition is justified by the fact that, in motivation and engagement research, these four elements have been independently associated with having a positive influence on student ASEC engagement in the classroom. Therefore, it can be predicted that they are likely to stimulate ASEC engagement in learning activities when implemented together. Moreover, given the fact that the elements are considered key developmental and psychological needs of students, it can also be expected that not supporting any of them is likely to negatively influence overall engagement in learning activities. Based on all this, I will now present the ProE model.

3.4 The ProE Model for ASEC Engagement in Learning Activities

The arguments presented in the previous sections lend support to the assumption that engaging learning activities may be a possible solution to begin to tackle the issue of low uptake of MFL in KS4 and beyond. This is mainly because, as previously discussed (cf. 3.3.2), engaging activities are key to building a positive mindset in students about the subject that is taught. Furthermore, it seems that accounting for meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence when designing learning activities may be sufficient to achieve our purpose of making activities fully engaging (i.e., ASEC engagement). In light of this, I would like to propose the following pedagogical model of activity designed to foster engagement at the academic, social, emotional and cognitive levels (Figure 3.2), which I call the ProE model for student ASEC engagement in learning activities (where the prefix 'Pro-' stands for 'promote' and also 'to be in favour of', and 'E' stands for 'engagement').

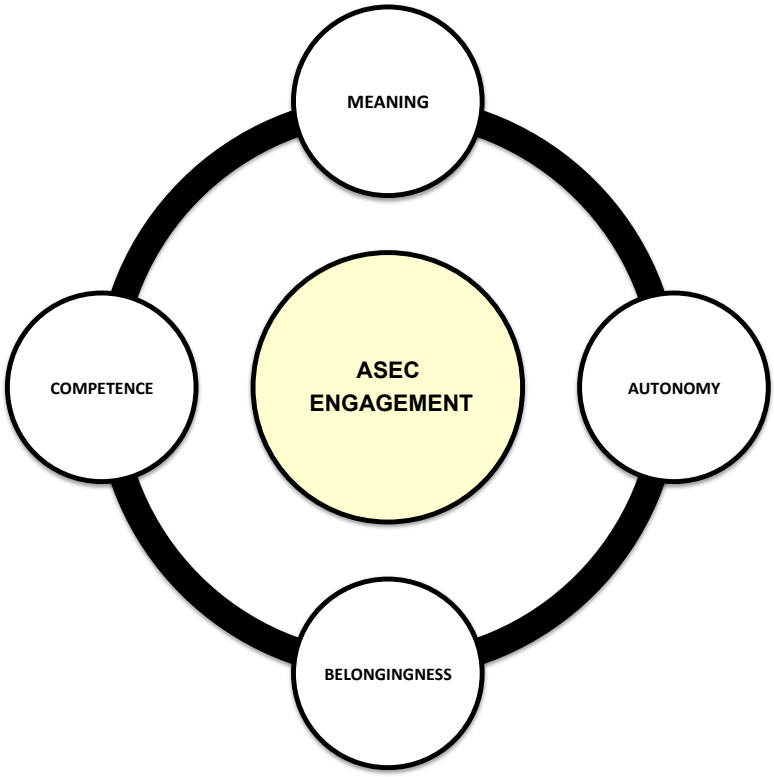

Figure 3.2: The ProE model for student ASEC engagement in learning activities

The logic behind the ProE model is that when learning activities are designed attending to the principles of meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence, the students' academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement is positively affected. By learning activities, I specifically mean tasks designed by the teacher to allow students to apply what they are learning or have learnt. In other words, learning activities are structured tasks aimed towards assessing knowledge in a formal way. It is important to make this distinction as, virtually everything that the teacher does in the classroom could be considered a learning activity, which would imply that everything that the teacher does should strictly follow the four principles of the ProE model. This, although ideal, would not be manageable from a practical perspective because that would involve applying the ProE model to minor, routine tasks such as questioning, discussing, games, etc. This is why I present the ProE model as a framework to be implemented rather than a set of attitudes to be adopted towards activity design. I

believe that, in the case of the former, it would be possible to argue for the consideration of the ProE model in every aspect of instruction (i.e., a model for classroom engagement rather than a model for engagement in learning activities). Another reason why the ProE model, as is, should not be applied to everything that the teacher does in the classroom is because this would in fact expand into the level of classroom engagement, which is not the focus of this present study.

As introduced earlier, in the ProE model the concept of meaningfulness is understood as activities that are perceived as valuable by the students, so that they are willing to invest the time and effort necessary to complete them. Autonomy refers to activities that make students feel empowered during these activities. Belongingness refers to activities that promote healthy social relationships with both peers and teacher. Finally, competence is conceived as activities that make students feel able to complete the activity successfully or efficiently (cf. OED 2002). Having said this, I argue that failing to consider any of the elements of the ProE model into the activity design would have a detrimental impact on student engagement. I justify this on the basis that research has consistently shown that to the degree to which meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness, and competence are unsupported or thwarted in the classroom, various manifestations of disengagement can be anticipated (see Reeve 2012 for a discussion regarding autonomy, belongingness, and competence; and Brophy 2008, for a discussion in relation to meaningfulness).

That being said, as hinted in Chapter One, in education research, practitioner-oriented models that guide teachers on how to engineer engaging learning activities in secondary school settings are scarce, at least in terms of models that conceive student engagement in the modern sense of the term: as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioural, affective, and cognitive subtypes. This could partly be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that a great deal of engagement research has been conducted at the level of school engagement, rather than at the level of learning activities (see Finn &

Zimmer, 2012, for a review). This is not surprising given that much engagement research has emerged to combat school attrition (see Eccles & Wang, 2012, for a discussion). On the other hand, it seems that engagement researchers have been deeply focused on theoretical issues, including establishing what engagement is and what it is not, understanding the dynamic relationships between its components and the interactions between engagement and contextual factors, and/or elaborating valid research instruments to accurately measure student engagement (see Christenson et al., 2012, for an illustration of this).

Finally, where attempts have been made, these either appear as extensive lists of facilitators for student engagement that foster ASEC engagement in learning activities (e.g., Belland et al., 2013), far too complex to be effortlessly embraced, assimilated, and infused by ordinary teachers within their everyday language-learning settings; or as sets of isolated variables which have been selected for one-off interventions rather than embraced as fully-fledged pedagogical models (e.g., Malloy et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014). Furthermore, student engagement is often not conceived as a multidimensional construct formed by the three dimensions of behaviour, emotion, and cognition, but rather understood as positive behaviour and/or positive emotions (e.g., Keller 1987). Additionally, some attempts seem to simply seek to promote ASEC engagement in learning activities in primary, rather than in secondary education (e.g., Malloy et al., 2013).

Therefore, it is not surprising that despite previous efforts, the development of practitioner-oriented models for student behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities in secondary school settings is still in its early stages. In view of this situation, I believe that the ProE model thus makes a valuable contribution to engagement research from an MFL perspective.

3.4.1 Project-Based Learning

Having presented the ProE model, in this study, I put the aforementioned model to the test through a project-based learning approach (PBL). PBL is generally understood as an inquiry-based teaching method that promotes student learning by solving challenges that resemble, or are, real-life problems (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Markham et al., 2003). It mostly consists of groups of students with increased autonomy working together on a sustained inquiry for periods of time longer than a classroom session to accomplish the project's goal, which usually adopts the form of an artefact (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Gresalfi et al., 2012). The role of teachers in PBL is thus as facilitators who help students move through the process together so that they can successfully accomplish the project's goal.

That being said, PBL shares many aspects of task-based learning (TBL) (see Van den Branden 2006, for a discussion of what TBL is and is not). Thus, both methods of instruction seek to engage students by making the task or the project the focus of the lesson rather than the knowledge, craft or skill to be acquired; both include a commitment to authenticity; both promote student autonomy by allowing students to drive their own learning, thus embracing the idea that there is not only one proper path to a goal; and finally both move the teacher to a position of facilitator and monitor. Perhaps then, the most marked difference between TBL and PBL is that PBL goes further in terms of both student-centeredness and content learning. That is, PBL extends for days, weeks, terms, and even academic years. Also, in addition to content knowledge, PBL seeks to promote the acquisition of valuable life skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking (Boss et al., 2013; Markham et al., 2003).

In light of this, there are various reasons why I opt for projects rather than tasks to assess the potential of the ProE model for ASEC engagement. First, as mentioned above, PBL

consists of a long-term learning endeavour in which students work towards an overarching goal. In long-term endeavours motivation and engagement are more difficult to sustain than in small activities that can be accomplished over a class period (see Dörnyei et al., 2013, for a discussion). Therefore, I feel that if the project is successful in terms of ASEC engagement, it could be expected that the ProE model is also likely to succeed in less challenging learning activities where engagement would be easier to sustain.

Second, PBL has affinity with the ProE model, which makes a strong case for its adoption. To clarify, consider for example, PBL's focus on real-world issues, which aligns with the principle of learning activities that are of value or importance to the students (i.e., meaningfulness). On the other hand, the fact that PBL offers opportunities for control over many aspects of a project integrates well with the principle of learning activities that empower students (i.e., autonomy). Finally, in PBL students work in groups to complete the project, which facilitates the principle of fostering interpersonal connections with peers (i.e., belongingness). On another note, although promoting students' beliefs in their own abilities to complete the projects (i.e., competence) is not an explicit element of PBL, this method is often characterised by its flexible nature, allowing for (ideally, rapid) adaptation in the face of unexpected twists and turns. Thus, in PBL teachers often need to revise and amend the project to fit the needs arising out of the specific learning situation (see Doherty & Eyring, 2006; Stoller 2006). This can help towards fighting low-levels of perceived competence throughout the course of the project and, as a result, increase the likelihood of its successful completion.

Third, the use of PBL in school settings has been shown to have a connection with student engagement and achievement (e.g., Boaler 2002; Cognition & Vanderbilt, 1992; Marx et al., 1997; Thomas 2000). This is somewhat unsurprising since it shares the principles of the ProE model, which in turn have been correlated with ASEC

engagement (cf. 3.3.3). On another note, PBL research has also shown that this instructional method can have a positive impact on student attitudes towards the subject where the project is conducted (e.g., Boaler 2002; Cognition & Vanderbilt, 1992). For example, in a recent study conducted in Turkey, Sesen and Tarhan (2013) found that inquiry-based laboratory activities not only produced significant gains in learning but also produced positive attitudes towards chemistry and laboratory. This study involved 62 high school students aged 16-18. These findings make the adoption of PBL even more appealing because of its potential for shaping student attitudes in addition to promoting student engagement. The former (i.e., attitudes), although it is not the particular goal of this present study, is what directs it (cf. 1.1).

Finally, the last reason why I propose using PBL to assess the potential of the ProE model for ASEC engagement is personal. That is to say, ever since I knew about PBL I have been trying to implement it in my practice. However, until this PhD study, I had not been able to do so. Therefore, I saw this study as an excellent opportunity to achieve my goal, since I had significant autonomy in selecting my research context. In what follows, I turn to describe and explain the methodology deployed in this investigation.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide the methodological framework upon which this investigation operates. This includes a discussion of (a) the participants; (b) the methodological approach adopted; (c) the data collection instruments used; (d) my approach to data analysis; and (e) the precautions taken to make this research involving adolescents as ethical as possible. In 4.2 I introduce the participants of this research: 19 Year 9 students and a fellow teacher. In 4.3, I explain the action research approach adopted in my investigation. I then discuss why my research is heavily informed by this particular methodology and I describe its structure. In the following section (4.4) I describe and provide a rationale for the research methods used to collect data. These include three types of interviews, a research journal, open-response questionnaires and post-project questionnaires. In 4.5, I present thematic analysis as the analytical approach used in this study, followed by a description of the steps taken to analyse the data gathered through the selected instruments. Finally, in 4.6, I address the ethical principles adhered to in order to ensure the fair treatment of my participants, and negotiate and gain informed consent from both the participants and the institution.

4.2 Participants

The participants can be separated into two categories. The first category includes what I call this investigation's 'primary participants'. This refers to 19 Year 9 students enrolled in MFL (Spanish) during the academic year 2014-2015 at a Catholic, state-funded school in England. In the second category we find the 'secondary participant(s)' of this research study. Here I include the Spanish teacher with whom I co-taught the MFL

class. I consider her a 'secondary participant' because she was not the direct recipient of the research although she was understandably deeply involved in it.

4.2.1 Students

As previously mentioned, the primary or main participants of this study were a group of 19 students taking Spanish as a regular MFL subject (two hours per week). The group consisted of 15 male students and four female students, ages 14-15. Amongst these students were six students of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds (non-British), including students of Indian, Turkish, and Polish origins. All of the students had attended primary school in England.

According to the school's records, the group encompassed four disadvantaged students (i.e., those whose family, social, or economic circumstances hinder their ability to learn at school), three more-able students (i.e., students who achieve Level 5c or above in KS2 end assessments but are not recognised as gifted or talented) and three gifted students (i.e., students who excel academically in one or more subject areas). Additionally, the group included three speakers of English as an additional language although they had native ability as they grew up in the UK. This group was newly formed, i.e., these students had not previously been placed in the same class.

Moreover, none of the students had previous experience with PBL methods or similar teaching approaches (i.e., experiential learning or field-based learning). Nevertheless, they had done some collaborative work in other subjects, and had occasionally been involved in activities that required a high degree of autonomy.

It is noteworthy that the number of participants in the group diminished to 17 in Term 3 (May 2014 onwards) because two students were permanently removed from the class for serious behavioural issues. In fact, this group was particularly characterised by a high number of problematic students (i.e., regularly defiant, disruptive, demanding of

attention, or demotivated). To illustrate, during the academic year, one or more times, interventions were made with nine students on issues related to classroom misbehaviour, fighting, anger management, and low motivation. In most cases the interventions consisted of parent-teacher meetings, reporting students, or in more severe cases removing students from the classroom or suspending them.

Given this challenging context, I believe this group is well suited for assessing the potential of the ProE model for ASEC engagement in learning activities. I feel that if the model works with (a) a group primarily comprised of male students, given that boys are usually less study-oriented than girls (see Houtte 2004, for a discussion); and (b) a group of difficult students (see Boynton & Boynton, 2005, for a discussion), it could also potentially work with other groups of MFL students. Hence, the reason why at the head teacher's suggestion, I accepted the challenge to deploy the ProE model with this group of students.

4.2.2 The Teacher

During the academic year 2013-2014, I taught Spanish collaboratively with an MFL teacher, Pamela (pseudonym). Originally from Spain, she moved to the UK in 2005 and joined the school in 2007 as an MFL teacher, becoming Head of Languages during the year in which this research was conducted. We met in 2011 at the Language Centre of the University of Warwick where we both acted as part-time Spanish language tutors. She had this job in addition to her full-time job at the school — at a time when she had fewer teaching hours. After that academic year she stopped working at the university in order to focus on the demands of her main job at the school. I, on the other hand, moved on to do my PhD, also leaving behind the Language Centre. However, despite taking different career paths we remained in contact. Consequently, as mentioned in Chapter One, she learnt about my research at a time when I was searching for a research context; and as one may infer, she expressed interest in participating in the study.

Pamela's willingness to collaborate with me stemmed from a desire to engage in professional development, especially in the area of modern teaching methods, including PBL. She also found it challenging to engage students in some lessons, and at the time was looking for ways to pique students' interests, and seeking pedagogical support to help her sustain engagement. Nevertheless, I must say that, her motivation was also somewhat extrinsically driven by the demands of her institution, where participation in external projects, although not required, is very much appreciated.

Pamela reported having neither previous experience nor training with PBL or similar instructional approaches to teaching that rely heavily on group work, student empowerment, and experimentation. She had received, and regularly receives, however, in-house and external training on the effectiveness of facilitators of engagement such as collaboration, formative assessment, and autonomy, amongst others. Nevertheless, she identified a lack of sufficient time and energy as reasons for not yet incorporating these facilitators into her everyday teaching practices. Thus, through our collaboration, Pamela hoped to find a time-efficient way in which she could improve student engagement (she reported).

Regarding her teaching style, I perceived Pamela as transitioning from a traditional towards a non-traditional teaching-style. This means that her approach to teaching was generally teacher-directed where she would combine rote learning and memorization with some TBL. Furthermore, she did not seem to be a strong advocate of student-centred instruction that "gives learners, and demands from them, a relatively high level of active control over the content and the process of learning" (Schweisfurth 2015: 20).

I decided to work with Pamela for several compelling reasons. The first was that I felt more comfortable at the time working with someone than working in isolation. This is because, although I had experience teaching adolescents in Spain, I had not yet taught in British secondary education. Therefore, using that logic I felt that counting on the

support of an experienced teacher would allow me to carry out my investigation without the interference of my inexperience. The second reason was her keen interest in improving her pedagogy. Helping other teachers in their profession in any way I can is what I enjoy most in my profession, so I could not miss out on this opportunity to help a colleague. Hence, my part in this research would involve informally instructing her on how to plan, organise and implement the ProE model. Finally and perhaps most importantly, from a practical perspective, Pamela had a great influence in her school as well as in her department. This paved the way for me to gain access to the school, which could have been much more difficult and time-consuming otherwise.

Having highlighted the above, it is important to mention that the nature of my collaboration with Pamela in this study evolved over time. Thus, what began as a collaborative teaching enterprise evenly divided between Pamela and me (i.e., activity design and implementation of the ProE model), ended up with me carrying out a more supportive role. In practical terms, this meant that, rather than collaboratively producing lessons and activities, first, I would design them myself and send them to Pamela for approval. Then, Pamela would carry out the implementation in the classroom under my supervision. In short, I would act as a guide, ensuring that the elements of the ProE model were supported throughout the learning activities (or projects in our case).

This was the result of several factors, two of which will be discussed. First, during the phase before the implementation of the project (September – December) I realised that the students were opening up to me both in and outside of the classroom (e.g., interviews). This seemed to have a positive effect particularly on the data gathered, which seemed to be of a better quality. This could possibly be attributed to my status as a visiting teacher, which they appeared to interpret as an adult in whom they could confide without threat to their student status within the school (e.g., speaking their minds about other teachers). Thus, figuratively holding on to my researcher's hat, I

decided that it was more beneficial, from a data collection perspective, to be perceived as the visiting teacher that comes from the University once a week rather than as a full-fledged member of staff. And this inevitably resulted in having Pamela take the lead role in the classroom sessions.

Second, during the same period (i.e., prior to the implementation of the model) I realised that the students generally responded to Pamela better than to me, possibly due to the fact that I was perceived as visiting teacher, as previously mentioned. It therefore became clearer to me that she should take a more leading role in the sessions. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, during the first implementation of the ProE model Pamela gradually became less available for co-planning the lessons due to other school commitments. This further pushed me into adopting a less teaching position (less sage on stage) and a more mentorship role (more guide on the side), as I would now have to be observant that Pamela would stick to the lesson plans. This position would remain for the rest of the study.

4.3 Action Research Approach

Action research (AR henceforth) originated in the field of social sciences in the late 1940s with the work of Lewin (1947) driven by the need to bring social theory closer to solving immediate social problems. AR is thus considered a strategy to solve problems rather than a specific method for collecting and analysing data (Denscombe 2010). It is a type of research that seeks to simultaneously change things and gain understanding, rather than simply understand a particular phenomenon, which is what traditional social science would do (Torbert 1981). As Somekh (1995: 340) notes:

> Action research [rejects] the concept of a two-stage process in which research is carried out first by researchers and then in a separate second stage the knowledge generated from the research is applied by practitioners. Instead the two processes of research and action are integrated. […] It directly addresses the knotty problem of the persistent failure of research in the social sciences to make a difference in terms of bringing about actual improvements in practice.

That being said, we could argue that in the field of education, AR is mostly characterised by an interventionist approach wherein teachers, acting as researchers, aim to change and/or improve a problematic situation that directly affects their own local environment (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Sagor 2011). This intervention is typically characterised by four essential, cyclical stages, commonly regarded as *planning*, *action*, *observation*, and *reflection* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Expanding on this, teacher-researchers thus, having identified a problematic situation, intervene by (1) planning strategies to change or improve the social situation (planning); (2) implementing such strategies (action); (3) systematically documenting the results of the intervention (observation); and (4) making sense of the data collected (reflection). Then they use the acquired knowledge and understanding resulting from the planned intervention to improve the situation, generally in the form of a new cycle (Kemmis et al., 2014). The former is graphically represented in Figure 4.1 below:

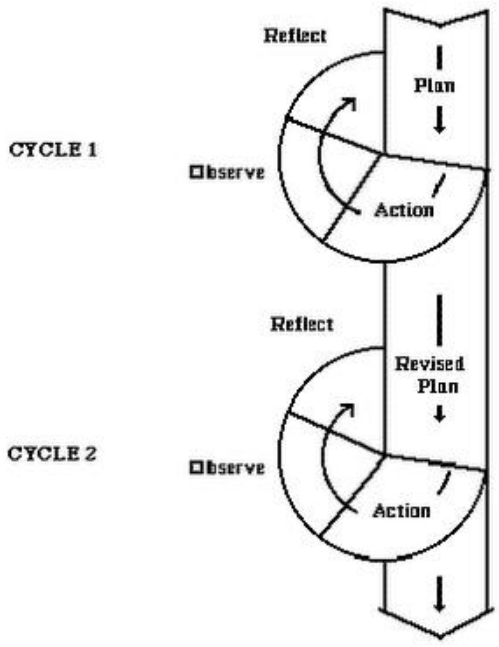

Figure 4.1: Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) model of action research

Furthermore, AR is also characterised by its subjective nature, which is given by a heavy reliance on qualitative methods (Schwalbach 2003; Zeni 1998). As Burns (2009: 127) points out, it "typically [relies] on the ability of the researcher to interpret the meanings of the data". Finally, another notable characteristic of AR refers to its local application. This means that, as it takes place in one's own environment of practice, the research outcomes cannot be generalised outside the local context on the basis that "it is not possible to reproduce the exact same conditions of the research to provide further evidence" (ibid.).

That said, I adopted an AR approach in the current research for the affinities that this method holds with the purposes of my investigation (cf. 1.1). However, I should clearly state that not all of the elements of AR fitted perfectly into my research framework, and hence the reason why it is presented as an **AR approach** rather than AR alone. Before examining the similarities of this current research with AR, allow me to identify what makes it different.

Firstly, this investigation sought to respond to a social problem that needed direct intervention. As previously mentioned (cf. 1.1), the problem lies in the small number of learners who progress to learn a foreign language after KS3. Consistent with the AR literature, this issue would belong to the area of AR that deals with attitudes and values, which Cohen et al. (2005: 226) describe as "encouraging more positive attitudes to work, or modifying pupils' value systems with regard to some aspect of life". That being said, this investigation did not follow this principle of AR scrupulously. To clarify, the magnitude of the problem, in fact, falls outside the conceptual confines of AR. Rather than being an issue solely affecting the teacher, as the credo of AR generally advocates (Denscombe 2010; Sagor 2011), it affects the entire nation. Therefore, contrasting with AR's core focus, the goal of this research was to take the first step towards providing a practical solution to the stagnation of foreign language learners' attitudes occurring in

Britain, which as I suggest consists of fostering student ASEC engagement. Closely connected to this is the fact that this present research also sought to transfer the findings to similar MFL contexts in British secondary education; an idea which, although not discredited by AR scholarship (Bassey 1998; Burton & Bartlett, 2005), is actually dissimilar to the degree of transferability that small-scale AR studies are believed to have (Denscombe 2010).

The second difference between this investigation and AR lay in my dual role in it. As previously mentioned, a defining characteristic of AR is the fact that it is conducted by teachers (rather than by researchers) in their own professional contexts. Conflicting with this tenet then, the intervention was carried out by a researcher in the role of a teacher, rather than the reverse. Thus, I intervened as a researcher-teacher in an MFL Year 9 classroom at a UK state school where neither the context of practice nor the students comprising it were my own, but someone else's (cf. 4.2.2).

Turning now to the similarities between this study and AR, three of the inherent aspects of AR were central to the adoption of this methodological approach. Firstly I needed a research method that would allow me to personally assess the potential of the ProE model for ASEC engagement in learning activities. This is mainly because the ProE model is designed for teachers; therefore, it felt logical that a (researcher) teacher should be the one implementing it rather than a 'detached' researcher. However, as the model had not been yet implemented, I felt that I should be the one putting it to the test rather than training a teacher in its implementation. The latter, arguably, would have been the ideal, however it would have been far too time-consuming. In light of all this, I found the participatory nature of AR suitable to meeting my research needs.

The second reason concerns the cyclical nature of AR. Thus, in addition to my participation it also seemed necessary to assess the ProE model several times within the same study (as opposed to one-off interventions) to ensure its validity in fostering ASEC

engagement in learning activities. In this regard, the cyclical process of AR that entails a sequence of diverse actions seemed to coincide with my objective. Therefore, in this investigation I conducted an AR (-like) project consisting of two research cycles that targeted the research question of this study, namely the extent to which the implementation of the ProE model would result in ASEC engagement. Thus, the idea behind this project was to attempt to provide an answer to the aforementioned question based on the data obtained in each research cycle. That answer, if positive as expected (cf. 3.3.3), should in turn provide guidelines for the refinement of the ProE model deployment in order to progress to a new cycle of AR to further ascertain the model's validity. I will now elaborate on how the implementation of the ProE model fitted within the four stages of AR, discussed above (Figure 4.1):

- **Planning**: As part of this stage I would focus on my most concerning problem, and then I would design strategies that would respond to it directly (Burns 2005, 2009). In the context of my research we can understand this as focusing my attention on fostering student ASEC engagement, and then, in response to this situation, engineering a language-learning project guided by the ProE model to be implemented with my research participants (cf. 4.2.1).
- **Action**: Once the action plan is in place, in the actional stage, I would proceed to its implementation in the classroom (Burns 2005, 2009). Thus, this phase would entail the introduction of a project designed under the guidelines of the ProE model in order to foster student ASEC engagement.
- **Observation** (or data collection): This step would consist of documenting the consequences of the informed action in a systematic way while "remaining open to surprises and responsive to opportunities" (Cohen et al., 2005: 229). In this stage then, I would collect evaluative evidence with the help of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research instruments (cf. 4.4). Nevertheless, differing slightly from the standard *observation* procedure of AR (Kemmis &

McTaggart, 2006) and embracing more dynamic perspectives of AR (Burns 2009; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Richards 2003), data collection would occur pre-, during and post application of the pedagogical framework.

- **Reflection** (or data analysis and discussion): The last stage of the AR cycle, evaluative and descriptive in nature (Burns 2009), would involve analysing and making sense of the data obtained, and as a result define new courses of action for new self-reflective cycles (Burns 2005). Thus, in this stage, I assess the outcomes of the implementation of the ProE model for student ASEC engagement in learning activities. Next, to complete the cycle, I propose guidelines for the refinement of the ProE model intervention (when necessary) in order to progress to a new cycle of AR.

The third reason I adopted an AR approach lies in its abovementioned qualitative nature. AR is a research method for researching one's context of practice. In this regard, AR studies are deemed unique, time- and context-specific, difficult to repeat and replicate because their conditions (e.g., teaching context, participants, action researcher, etc.) are unlikely to be found in a different context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Sagor 2011). Consequently, some authors opine that for AR studies to have some replicative power they need to increase their trustworthiness so that "other teachers who read the findings will be able to ascertain whether or not the project is applicable to them or their students" (Schwalbach 2003: 9). As Denscombe (2010: 81) highlights, "It is the rigour, rather than the size of the project or its purpose, by which the research should be judged". One of the best ways to achieve rigour is by using multiple forms of qualitative research methods that can provide the reader with a rich picture of the study's specific circumstances (Burns 2009; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This is what some authors refer to as (qualitative) triangulation (Denzin 2012; Riazi & Candlin, 2014), and would include the use of research instruments such as interviews, the study of diaries or autobiographies (Burns 2009; Dörnyei 2007).

Therefore, in order to conduct this investigation I needed a research methodology that, in addition to offering me the opportunity to assess the potential of the ProE model for student ASEC engagement, would have a firm qualitative orientation. This can be explained on the basis that the study of engagement comes from a fairly long, positivist tradition (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for a discussion), which is defined by Riazi and Candlin (2014: 137) as a research paradigm that, "typically draw[s] on quantitative methodology and related methods, measuring defined variables in order to explain relationships and to advance generalizable inferences". Thus, adopting an adversarial position, driven by modern directions of inquiry in engagement research, I wanted to divert from the dominant approach to researching human behaviour (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1990).

To explain, in modern engagement research there are calls for action to embrace methodologies that give a clearer picture of how and why students engage or disengage in learning activities (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a discussion). This call is prompted by the many studies that use quantitative methods of inquiry (see Fredricks et al., 2011, for a review of instruments used to measure engagement), which generally include student self-report questionnaires with large numbers of students, (quantitative) teacher reports on students, and (quantitative) observational measures. Therefore, the idea behind this is that neutral and precise measurement of human behaviour, because it depersonalises students and turns them into numerical information, cannot inform us in great detail about an individual's engagement experience. In light of this, Fredricks et al. (2004: 89) state that qualitative methods can "shed light on how the various types of engagement develop and interact, as well as on why some students begin to disengage from school [or learning activities in our case]". Moreover, thick descriptions can also help us understand how and why contextual factors influence engagement (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). As Fredricks et al. (2004: 85) also note:

> Because surveys often combine questions about the classroom, the school, academics, and social relationships, it is difficult to determine the actual source of engagement, how engagement is related to context, and how engagement changes if conditions are altered.

Finally, the fourth reason why I embraced AR deals with the professional self-development side of this research method. As mentioned above, AR is participative, i.e., the practitioner, or researcher, in the case of this study, is fully involved in the research process as both teacher and researcher. In other words, the researcher is to the forefront (i.e., the classroom) rather than at a distance. This allows the teacher-researcher, or researcher-teacher, in our case, to benefit from an insider experience that can be used to improve his or her practice (Denscombe 2010). Moreover, since I had always been interested in gaining teaching experience at the school level in the UK, I saw AR as the ideal vehicle to achieve both my professional and research aspirations.

Overall, the preceding suggests that an AR approach can significantly contribute to this present research. First, as AR is participative and a cyclical process it can help me deploy the ProE model in a school setting several times with the aim of ascertaining its potential for ASEC engagement in learning activities. Second, AR's strong qualitative orientation can help me deal with the issue of the narrow array of methods (i.e., quantitative methods) used to study engagement, and thus obtain insight into the impact of the ProE model on student ASEC engagement. Finally, an AR approach would offer me the chance to grow as a practitioner while simultaneously conducting my research.

From my point of view, it may then be proposed that there are considerable advantages in adopting an informed AR approach to this investigation rather than using the model in its typical form (see Burns 2005, for a discussion). For example, it seems that the main challenge that AR faces today is that educators lack the time, motivation, support, and academic research skills to meaningfully engage in legitimate inquiry (Denscombe 2010; Dörnyei 2007). All this has led the scientific community to question the reliability and validity of this particular research method; and by implication, to underestimate the impact that AR can make in national and international initiatives (Burns 2005). Thus,

considering the issue of time, I was a full-time researcher whose only duty was to conduct this research. In this context then, time was not particularly an issue. Regarding motivation, as this investigation constitutes my PhD research there is no doubt that I was highly motivated in its pursuit. Concerning support, since I was a researcher-teacher, and not the reverse, lack of support was not a factor in this research. Finally, with respect to having the appropriate training necessary to generate a legitimate piece of research, as with the previous point, this did not pose a problem due to my status as a researcher-teacher. All this considered, we could argue then that the nature of this research seemingly minimised the inherent problems of AR, thus allowing for a more rigorous fulfilment of its objective, that of "the enhancement of practice and the introduction of change into the social enterprise" (Dörnyei 2007: 191). In the following section, I explain the instruments of data collection employed in this research along with their respective roles.

4.4 Data Collection Instruments

As I discussed earlier, in order to broaden the scope of my AR approach and, therefore, expand the validity of the results to contexts other than mine, it is paramount to employ a rich array of qualitative instruments, or qualitative triangulation (see Denzin 2012, for a discussion). According to Riazi and Candlin, this course of action would allow me to "describe the complexity of reality and the full nature of the social phenomena under study" (Riazi & Candlin, 2014: 137), and also "seek convergence and corroboration between the results obtained from different methods, thereby eliminating the bias inherent in the use of a single method" (ibid. 144). Thus, in view of the foregoing, this research combined multiple forms of qualitative research methods. These included interviews, open-response questionnaires, post-project questionnaires, and a research journal. I discuss these in the following sub-section.

4.4.1 Interviews

I chose the interview method to find answers for my research question for two complementary reasons. Firstly, interviews are the research instrument par excellence of qualitative inquiry (Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003). On these grounds, the adoption of this method became an essential element in properly conducting this qualitative-driven study. Secondly and most importantly, interviews, when properly conducted, allow researchers to gain understanding "at a depth that is not possible with other methods" (Richards 2009: 187). Considering this, as I was interested in gaining a deep understanding of the extent to which the implementation of the ProE model would result in student ASEC engagement, I saw the interview as the most suited instrument to achieve my objectives. In connection to this, Fredricks and McColskey (2012: 767) state:

> One benefit of interview methods is they can provide insight into the reasons for variability in levels of engagement to help understand why some students do engage while others begin to withdraw from school. Interviews can provide a detailed descriptive account of how students construct meaning about their school experiences, which contextual factors are most salient, and how these experiences relate to engagement.

That being said, the interviews conducted were conceptualised as co-constructed and transformative events, which are largely context-specific. I thus conceived interviews as: (a) ventures in which knowledge is jointly generated by means of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee(s) (co-constructed) (Mann 2011; Richards 2009); (b) experiences that would mature one's understanding of the topic under scrutiny (transformative) — perceptions of it are subject to change over the course of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009); and (c) events that are considerably shaped by the interviewer's identity and position, and the context in which knowledge is constructed (context-specific) (Pavlenko 2007).

Regarding the types of interviews and their aims, I conducted three different types of interviews, each of them attending to one or more aspects of the research question of this study (Table 4.1). These were:

- Pre-model implementation pair interviews with the students
- After-project group interviews with the students
- Interviews with Pamela

4.4.1.1 Pre-Model Implementation Pair Interviews with Students

Prior to the implementation of the ProE model, I held interviews with the participating students in pairs in order to establish an initial contact and also roughly gauge their attitudes and motivations towards learning foreign languages (N=19). At the end of the academic course, these interviews would also allow me to compare whether there had been a perceived change in students' attitudes towards MFL due to the ProE model intervention. Having said this, it is noteworthy that, due to the odd number of participants I had to hold a one-on-one interview (the last one).

I leaned towards pair interviews rather than individual interviews for purely practical reasons. Since the learners did not have time to be interviewed out of class time, I was obliged to make alternative arrangements. This meant speeding up the interview process in order to reduce the amount of class-time lost and the number of disruptions (i.e., fewer times in which students would leave the classroom), while at the same time, keeping the essence of a one-on-one interview. The pair interview thus seemed like a reasonable option to achieve these goals for different reasons. Firstly, with the pair interviews, I would reduce the number of interviews by half, thereby keeping class disruption to a minimum. Secondly, pair interviews would allow me to replicate, to a great extent, the environmental conditions featured in individual interviews — where the conversation is generally easier to control than, for example, in-group interviews (Eder

& Fingerson, 2003), and also where the interviewer can spend a considerable amount of time with the respondent. Consequently, I would be able to gather similar data from the respondents in terms of both detail and quantity. Finally, pair interviews would also present some of the advantages of group interviews. These are detailed below alongside the disadvantages, which also apply to pair interviews.

4.4.1.2 After-Project Group Interviews with Students

After each implementation of the ProE model (two in total) I conducted group interviews with the students. With this type of interview I sought to expand on, and understand more fully, the individual accounts given by the students in the after-project questionnaires (cf. 4.4.4). I wanted to do likewise at the group level with the same project groups to ensure the truthfulness of the information provided in the after-project questionnaires (Morgan 1993). The aim of the former questionnaires, as I explain hereafter in this chapter, was to study the impact of each project on student ASEC engagement, as well as help identify contextual factors that shaped the students' engagement or disengagement; this was also done with the intention of paving the way for the group interview. Thus, a total of ten group interviews were held. The first round, after the first project, featured four group interviews with a total of 19 students, while the second round, after the completion of the second project, included six group interviews with 16 students in total.

The group interviews aligned well with my research objective, which was that of delving deeply into the complexity of student engagement while maintaining rigorous quality standards. To illustrate, firstly, group interviews are regarded as very effective research instruments for eliciting more accurate accounts than individual interviews, especially when young individuals are involved (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). One reason for this is because there is less room for subjectivity, as more than one respondent is involved in the co-construction of knowledge and the negotiation (and renegotiation) of

meaning (Kuchah & Pinter, 2012). In practical terms, this means that the respondents' contributions are generally subject to the judgements of their peers, who (ideally) evaluate and contest the veracity of the information provided. As Bryman (2012: 503) notes:

> In conventional one-to-one interviewing, interviewees are rarely challenged; they might say things that are inconsistent with earlier replies or that patently could not be true, but we are often reluctant to point out such deficiencies. In the context of a focus group, individuals will often argue with each other's views. This process of arguing means that the researcher might stand a chance of ending up with more realistic accounts of what people think, because they are forced to think about and possibly revise their views.

In my case, the group-talk proved to be an effective way to capture a reasonably objective vision of the salient engaging (and disengaging) moments of the shared project experience, and their causes. That is, by interviewing the project groups rather than the students individually, I was able not only to crosscheck their answers with the ones given in the after-project questionnaire but also to test the veracity of those answers against the judgement of their peers. As a result of this, in the interview transcripts there is evidence of students challenging each other's responses, co-constructing the conversation, and clarifying ideas, amongst other features. All of this is illustrated in Chapters Six and Seven when I present interview transcripts.

Another potential reason why the group interview was an effective method for obtaining high-quality data is because it also facilitates a context in which students feel more at ease, mainly because they outnumber the adults in the setting (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). As Kuchah and Pinter (2012) argue in this respect, "being at ease with each other in a group naturally decreases the power the adult may have and gives the children some control over the adult agenda". In this sense, as the excerpts scattered across Chapters Six and Seven will demonstrate, it is not surprising that the relaxing atmosphere provided by the group interview allowed me to gather honest and extended responses from the students.

Finally, group interviews can also uncover specific concepts or themes that would not be spoken of in individual interviews (Kuchah & Pinter, 2012; Wilkinson 2010). This is understandable if we take into account that, in, group interviews, the respondents themselves become elicitors of information by means of interaction (e.g., building on each other's talk, jogging the memory of others with the help of their contributions, etc.), which may lead to a richer amount of information (Hill et al., 1996). Examples of these are featured in Chapters Six and Seven.

Having said this, group interviews (and by extension, pair interviews) are not without their pitfalls. In this kind of interview the participants may tailor their responses to seek the approval of the interviewer (or the teacher in this particular case), or simply to be more congruent with the responses of their peers (see Fingerson 1999). The former factor is usually caused by power dynamics amongst peers (Adler 1998; Eder & Fingerson, 2003), or might even be due to an irrational attachment to a certain viewpoint (Janis 1982). Also, especially in pair/group interviews with students, it might be the case that some interviewees feel uncomfortable with sharing personal information in front of their peers, and also that there are personal differences between students (Eder & Fingerson, 2003).

To mitigate this, I put several strategies in place for both the pair and group interviews. For example, I tried to group students on the basis of friendship. This was possible for the pair interviews but more difficult to achieve for the group interviews because such interviews featured the groups participating in the project, which, as Chapters Six and Seven will highlight, were assembled so as to prevent the existence of groups of friends working together. Moreover, in order to elicit truthful information from the students I used techniques such as: encouraging honesty; emphasising the relevance of having different personal views for the interview; and stressing that our discussion was entirely confidential and anonymous (Bryman 2012; Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003). Indeed, this

was all accompanied, as far as possible, by an empathetic (though neutral) stance that would allow me to obtain a greater amount of information from the students (see Chapters Six and Seven, for examples).

4.4.1.3 Interviews with Pamela

During the academic course I informally interviewed Pamela on five occasions. This was so that I could obtain another viewpoint on the ProE model implementation and its impact on ASEC engagement. Thus, I felt that inviting a second (although subjective) pair of eyes would help strengthen the validity and reliability of my findings, especially since Pamela knew about the average engagement levels of Year 9 students, and also knew some of the students from previous years. This would make her perspective even more valuable since she was in a position to compare the students' levels of engagement and attitudes not only from the beginning and the end of the course, but also across the years. This will be seen on some of the interview transcripts presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

The interviews were not formally arranged in advance; they arose once I had compiled a list of topics/areas I was willing to investigate, which were derived from my experience of working with her. In addition to this, despite the fact that we are both Spanish speakers, I decided to hold the interviews in English because I felt that we were skilled enough to use English to the same extent as our native language — and, therefore, be 'ourselves' when speaking a foreign language as well (see Mann 2011, for a discussion). Also, I opted for English as the language of the interviews in order to waive issues arising from the translation of transcripts, such as letting my subjectivity get in the way of an accurate representation of the reality (Richards 2003). In spite of this, I must note that Pamela was allowed to code-switch at any time in case she needed to express herself more naturally — although this was not necessary in most cases. Another reason why I conducted the interviews in English rather than in Spanish was that since the

interview related to an English setting, this would mean that any cultural or conceptual aspects specific to this would not need to be translated (Richards 2003).

Table 4.1: Types and aims of interviews conducted during this research

Interview type	Participants	Aim
Pair interviews	19 students	Gather information about students' attitudes towards foreign language learning *before* the implementation of the ProE model.
Group interviews (After 1st project)	19 students	Gather information about the students' experiences with the first project.
Group interviews (After 2nd project)	16 students	Gather information about the students' experiences with the second project.
Informal interview (x5)	Pamela	Provide a second account on the implementation of the ProE model and its impact on ASEC engagement.

4.4.1.4 Interview Design and Implementation

I designed semi-structured interviews for all three type of interviews discussed above. I chose this interview style because I wanted to free my respondents from the constraints of a structured interview in order to obtain richer data. However, I also wanted to do so in a controlled way and within the confines of an interview guide. As the literature shows, semi-structured interviews can achieve this due to their flexible structure in which key topics generally substitute rigid questions (Bryman 2012; Cohen et al., 2005; Dörnyei 2007). Thus, this considerable degree of open-endedness, though controlled by the interviewer, allows for a much deeper exploration of the individual's inner self by means of, for instance, probing for detail, and clarification of misconceptions (Richards 2003, 2009). Furthermore, the aforementioned flexibility also provides a great deal of leeway for the emergence of spontaneous co-constructed new topics, and allows for rapport building with the respondent(s) (Bryman 2012). My objectives could not have

been better accomplished with either a fully structured interview, due to its lack of flexibility, or with an open interview, because of the lack of control by the interviewer.

Following Richards' (2003) suggestions, in preparation for the interviews, my first move was to draft an interview guide with the topics I wanted to cover alongside some memory prompts to explore these topics. To some extent, I did not specify the sequence in which I would cover them, and this was actually decided during the course of the interview (Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003). Nevertheless, there were some topics whose order was established in order to make the respondents feel that they had participated in a conversation with structure, progression, and most importantly, purpose (Richards 2009). To illustrate, in the pair interviews, I started off with non-intrusive personal questions about interests and hobbies and I gradually moved on to more purposeful 'down-to-business' questions. The topics/questions featured in the interviews were influenced by a wide array of factors. Some of these were informal chats with teachers and researchers, research articles on my research topic, questions or topics that other researchers have used in their interviews, and my own experience in language teaching. In the case of the pair interviews, the pilot interview also had a great influence in shaping the final interview guide.

Additionally, in harmony with the literature (Cohen et al., 2005; Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003, 2009), I conducted a pilot for the pre-model implementation pair interviews. However, I did not do this for the group interviews or the informal interviews with Pamela for the reasons specified below. Regarding the pair interviews, I piloted my interview questions with 4 students (2 boys and 2 girls) taking Spanish in another Year 9 group. As for the group interviews, I considered a pilot unnecessary for two reasons. First, as this type of interview was intended to gather information about the after-project experience of the group, I needed individuals who had gone through that particular experience, so interviewing students from other groups was not an option. Second, I felt

that piloting the interview with some of my Year 9 students who would also be present in the real interview would not be feasible from an ethical standpoint. On another note, I left the informal interviews with Pamela unpiloted for the same reasons as the after-project group interviews. That is, a formal pilot for our interviews could not be done because I would need someone with the same characteristics, and this was just not possible. Secondly, each one of the interviews was different in terms of topics, questions, and sometimes even in the approach; therefore, a pilot for each one of our interviews (five in total) would have been unfeasible in practical terms.

That said, regardless of the type of interview, as recommended by Richards (2003), I did trial all the interviews several times with some fellow PhD students at the Centre for Applied Linguistics. This allowed me to improve and refine my interview technique as well as the structure of the interview in question, including timings and prompts. In addition, I treated each one of the interviews as a new opportunity to grow in the art of interviewing (Richards 2003, 2009). Thus, in a way, each interview was a new learning experience for me.

Having organised the topics and designed the prompts for the interviews (and piloted them, in the case of the pre-model implementation pair interviews) I proceeded to look for an appropriate space to conduct the interviews. For the informal interviews with Pamela, the choice was obvious; I could interview her in her own classroom or outside school. Nevertheless, for the pair and group interviews I was compelled to look for other venues since regular classes and the interviews would occur concurrently. In this respect, I tried to stick to Richards' (2003) directions as much as possible and I always searched for 'unthreatening' spaces in which my students would feel comfortable, which would allow me to elicit more valid and natural responses (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Thus, often, both the pair and group interviews took place in actual classrooms except for times in which these were unavailable and we had to use an empty office.

In the majority of the cases, once I had elaborated and polished the interview guide(s), and selected a suitable space in which to conduct the interviews, I moved on to the implementation phase. In the instance of the pre-model implementation pair interviews, their implementation took place after an initial period of observation (cf. 5.2), which Eder and Fingerson (2003) highly recommend for the successful introduction of interviews with adolescents. As they note, without such observation, I would have found it very challenging to engage for the first time with the respondents in a natural manner (see also, Kuchah & Pinter, 2012). I must say that the following was also applied to Pamela. That is, even though there was not a formal period of observation, I carefully studied her in all respects (e.g., behaviour within the school, motivations, beliefs, etc.) for about a month before I first interviewed her. This was especially useful in developing a tactful and safe approach to interviewing her.

Regarding the student observations, I first assessed my prospective respondents while in my role as their teacher from a socio-psychological perspective, during a two-month period (September – November). This allowed me to understand, among other things, the social dynamics of the classroom, and study aspects such as personalities, behavioural patterns, language routines, communicative norms, and social structures. Also, the observation period gave me the opportunity to build a high degree of rapport with the students and gain their trust (Kuchah & Pinter, 2012). Overall, the knowledge obtained from the observation period considerably impacted on me, especially regarding the first interview. To illustrate, the period of observation affected the way in which I paired the students for the pre-model implementation pair interviews (i.e., students who got along well), the order in which I conducted the interviews (i.e., starting first with those students with whom I had a better relationship and leaving the more 'difficult' ones for when I was more experienced with the interview process), the interview development itself (e.g., placing more emphasis on topics on which I knew the student

were very vocal); and my approach to the questioning (e.g., being more or less subtle depending on my relationship with the students).

Regarding the implementation of the interviews, once in the room, the pre-interview stage mainly consisted of some small talk to break the ice (Richards 2003). Here I would take the opportunity to explain the purpose of the interview and I would also highlight the value of the participants' contributions to the education sector. Furthermore, in my first contact with the participants I also explained the nature of my research and I discussed the contents of the informed consent form with them. Before starting the interviews (both pair and group), I encouraged the students to follow some basic conversational rules during the interview to avoid transcription issues. These mainly consisted of speaking loudly and clearly, and turn taking.

Thus, all the interviews opened with a fairly easy-to-answer, open-ended question (Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003). This, in most cases, was designed to lead to the first topic in my interview guide. After the opening question, I then moved on to the remaining topics. Exploiting the benefits of the semi-structured interview, these were occasionally covered in a fairly non-linear manner. Also, when possible, I used my respondents' replies to move from one topic to another. This helped to establish a sense of a jointly constructed conversation (with a purpose) rather than an overly structured Q&A session (Bryman 2012; Richards 2003, 2009). In turn, the aforementioned non-linearity also helped me establish a non-threatening atmosphere in which the interviewees could feel comfortable expressing themselves — and thus, develop unexpected lines of discussion (Richards 2003).

On another note, during each interview, following Richards' suggestions for responding in an interview as encompassed in Table 4.3, I tried to show genuine interest in the respondents' answers. I also set out, as far as possible, to adopt the role of a discussion facilitator to a respondent-based conversation. Furthermore, in every interview I sought

to minimise the number of my interventions to strive for a well-balanced interview (ibid.). Regarding the former, I endeavoured to limit my participation in the conversation to merely asking questions, checking for understanding, seeking clarification, following-up on answers, and probing for detail. Whenever possible, I also refrained from indicating agreement or disagreement and expressing my viewpoint.

Table 4.2: Responding in an interview (Richards 2003: 54)

Do	**Don't**
Listen carefully (e.g., non-verbally say, "I'm listening")	Close off interviewee space
Offer supportive feedback (e.g., "hmm", "yes")	Interpret for the interviewee
Respond to emotion (give interviewee chance to talk about it)	Judge (e.g., offer a moral comment, advice or consolation)
Let the interview take its own shape – let the interviewee discover things as well	Stick rigidly to the topics you think you are important
Monitor your responses to give the interviewee proper space	Interrupt unthinkingly

At the end of the interviews, there was a winding down phase in which I would thank the participants and allow some time for questions and clarifications (Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003). Additionally, I always gave the participants a token of appreciation for their collaboration. In the case of Pamela, this took the form of informal luncheons during the academic year. In the case of the students, this meant lots of sweets and, whenever appropriate, I offered to converse about any topic they had in mind (see Eder & Fingerson, 2003, for a discussion) — an opportunity that they seized very happily. In so doing, I was trying to achieve a higher degree of reciprocity, which in turn would allow me to empower the learners, hopefully leading to a reduction of the potential power inequality in future engagements (Kuchah & Pinter, 2012; Lather 1988; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Furthermore, as recommended by Richards (2003, 2009), after each interview I also completed an evaluation form on which I evaluated the overall development of the interview with a view to improving my approach. The interview

evaluation form included aspects such as my interview technique, further topics to be covered or follow-up questions, and the lessons learnt.

Finally, regarding the process of recording and transcribing the interviews, as recommended in the literature (e.g., Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003), I used two recorders in each interview to avoid missing any data due to technical issues. Then the data recorded was transcribed for easier analysis. In the transcription sheet, I numbered each line so that I could identify pieces of data rapidly and precisely, and I also kept a column on the side of the sheet where I made annotations alongside the interviewee's words (Denscombe 2010) (see Appendix B). The former allowed me to record any memories recalled during the transcription process, which would in turn help better interpret the data (Dörnyei 2007). Finally, for the transcription, I did not follow a naturalised transcription approach where utterances are described in as much detail as possible (i.e., stutters, pauses, accents, noises). Rather, I embraced a denaturalised approach where the data, although still representing a verbatim depiction of speech, is slightly 'cleaned up' in terms of minute details so that it is easier to understand by the reader (Oliver et al., 2005). I felt that since the focus of the interviews was to explore a particular phenomenon (i.e., focus on content) rather than, for example, exploring communication itself (i.e., focus on the form) it was not absolutely necessary to provide a naturalised transcription; a highly time-intensive activity for more than ten hours of interview data. That being said, I am aware that my decision affected the authenticity of the data, as the data was stripped of some of its meaning. Having explained the nature and process of the interviews of this study, I will now move on to discuss the next instrument of data collection, the research journal.

4.4.2 Research Journal

In addition to interviews, I used a descriptive research journal during the course of my qualitatively oriented research (i.e., September 2013 – August 2014), as suggested by a

wide body of social research scholarship (e.g., Altrichter & Holly, 2005; Bryman 2012) and more particularly, by AR scholars (Burns 2005, 2009; Nunan 2005).

Accordingly, keeping a record of one's perceptions of both the events happening in the context under investigation and the personal reactions to such events can help the action researcher better understand and plan his or her research, and ultimately grow as a professional (Burns 2009). Regarding the former, as Silverman (2013) explains, by keeping an orderly track of the evolution of our research we can, on one hand, provide ideas for the future direction of our work and, on the other, develop our thinking, reflection, and time management. Moreover, a research journal can also help contrast the information obtained from other instruments and thus contribute to enhancing the overall quality of the research (Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2009).

In light of the foregoing, I was inclined to adopt this method in my research in spite of its main disadvantages, which are generally attributed to the fact that keeping a research journal is labour intensive, and also that the veracity of the descriptive accounts may be subject to the ability of the action researcher to accurately capture reality (cf. Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). In my case, being a full-time researcher rather than a full-time teacher-researcher, the time-consuming nature of keeping a research journal was not a factor for me. Also, as the research journal acted as a supporting source of data rather than the core research instrument, the subjectivity issue was not a major concern. In this regard, as I reveal in Chapters Six and Seven, it is noteworthy that this research took an unexpected turn once the data was collected, which in fact turned the research journal into the primary source of data for one particular type of analysis, despite the threat posed to validity and reliability of that particular type of analysis. This will be discussed in Chapter Six.

As far as the data entry is concerned, I usually made journal entries as soon as possible after the events (Burns 2009). At times this was done as soon as I returned home, at

other times this was done the following day. In any case, I always noted my main points of reflection upon finalising the event in order to avoid forgetting important details. In this regard, in line with Cryer's (2006) recommendations I provided the entries with some structure. Thus, in each one of them I tried to answer the following four simple questions (see Appendix C, for an example):

- What happened?
- How do I feel about it?
- What have I learnt from this?
- What is the next move?

The entries were organised in chronological order. I wrote a descriptive title for each one to help me rapidly reconstruct the events at a glance. Apart from written entries, in the journals I also included relevant illustrative materials such as pictures, whenever I deemed it necessary. In so doing, I hoped to be able to recall certain events with more intensity (Burns 2009). In addition, I conceived the research journal as a private collection of my personal accounts, from which I would only disclose the information I felt comfortable with sharing (Altrichter & Holly, 2005; Dörnyei 2007). This was very helpful, as I did not have to contain myself in my writing, nor censor my feelings. On a final note, as recommended in the literature (e.g., Burgess 1981; Ferrance 2000; Hughes 2000; Nadin & Cassell, 2006) I reviewed my journal from time to time (i.e., every two months or so) in order to assess my thought process from a wider perspective. The aim was to help me make a more objective assessment of my research situation, which would allow me to act with more precision when it came to modifying aspects of my research. In the sub-section that follows, I consider the open-response questionnaires.

4.4.3 Open-Response Questionnaires (or Reflection Sheets)

In addition to the previous two approaches to data collection discussed above, I employed a third qualitative research instrument, the open-response questionnaire(s) (Brown 2009), which I often refer to as the reflection sheet across this study for reasons that I specify below (see Appendices D and E, for samples). This is a type of questionnaire that includes items "where the actual question is not followed by the response options for the respondent to choose from but rather by some blank space (e.g., dotted lines) for the respondent to fill" (Dörnyei 2003: 47). Thus, I opted for this particular data collection instrument because I wanted to gather evidence of student ASEC engagement throughout the project, in addition to documenting such evidence at the end of the project by means of the after-project group interviews (cf. 4.4.1.2) and after-project questionnaires (cf. 4.4.4). Furthermore, I wanted to obtain richer information than just quantifiable data (i.e., after-project questionnaires, which I address later on), in a way that would not be too time and effort-intensive but allow for regular data collection.

In addition to the primary objective of the open-response questionnaires, their secondary aims included learning about the problems and challenges (as well as the strengths) that the project, and thus the implementation of the ProE model, posed to the students in terms of ASEC engagement. This would better help me "determine the actual source of engagement [or disengagement], how engagement is [was] related to context, and how engagement changes [changed] if conditions are [were] altered" (Fredricks et al., 2004: 86), which is an area that is often unexplored by engagement researchers (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). It can be argued that, although much progress has been made regarding which aspects of the context influence engagement and to what extent, to date there is still limited empirical evidence regarding the nature of such interactions (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a discussion). This is explained, in part, by the fact that

measures of engagement often rely on quantitative methods that can hardly go beyond mere description of causality (ibid.). Moreover, I also used open-response questionnaires as a tool to bolster student engagement through self-assessment and feedback, as recommended in formative assessment research (see William 2011, for a discussion). Accordingly, on the one hand, it is known that when students (a) assess their own work, (b) identify discrepancies between current and desired performance, and (c) they identify and implement courses of action to improve their understanding or skills (Cauley & McMillan, 2010: 207) they engage with their work more deeply. This is partly related to the fact that they feel more involved with the learning process (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). On the other hand, feedback, especially that directs "attention to what's next rather than focusing on how well or badly the student did on the work" (William 2011: 128) helps close the gap between students' current and desired performance and, as a result, contributes to enhance engagement.

The respondents individually completed the questionnaires three times across the course of each project; the first questionnaire was given out in the initial stages of the project, the second in the middle stages, and the third towards the project's completion. This implementation strategy was kept for both projects one and two. Also, regarding questionnaire administration, prior to submitting each open-response questionnaire the students were always reminded of its purposes and why it was worth answering — namely, the benefits of reflective practices for learning (see William 2011). I must admit that, initially, I had planned to have students complete an open-response questionnaire every week for the duration of the project to collect as much data as possible. However, I was unable to do so, since we frequently ran out of time and at times the class dynamics (e.g., misbehaviour, tiredness, etc.) simply did not allow for reflection time.

The format of the open-response questionnaires was designed in a friendly way to encourage participation. In other words, the questionnaire was kept relatively short (i.e.,

both sides of a page for the first project and only one side for the second project), using a booklet format (in the case of the questionnaires for the first project), reducing the density of the questionnaire as much as possible, and using coloured paper to enhance its attractiveness. These aspects are discussed in more detail in Section 4.4.4 where I address the after-project questionnaires. Additionally, as far as time-effectiveness is concerned, the questionnaire was laid out so that it could be answered over a ten-minute period at the end of the class. I felt that a longer reflective engagement after a one-hour class (two hours on some occasions) would jeopardise the quality of the answers given. Consequently, the questionnaires only featured a select number of sentence completion items (i.e., approximately six in each questionnaire), which encouraged the respondents to write a response of more than sentence and up to a paragraph in length. Amongst the reduced number of open-ended questions, I also included one close-ended item: a rating scale, which "[required] the respondent to make an evaluative judgement of the target by marking one of a series of categories organized into a scale" (Dörnyei 2003: 36). This was so that I could evaluate the students' overall satisfaction with the lesson (i.e., emotional engagement). Although it can be argued that the inclusion of such an item did not lead to obtaining meaningful data, the truth is that the rating scales allowed me to observe a rise or a drop in student satisfaction during the project, the reason(s) for which would be potentially explained by the responses in the open-ended items.

Following in this vein, the design of the questionnaire items was approached from two perspectives. For the first project, I adhered to Brown's (2009) considerations. Therefore, as with the interviews, I spent some time reflecting on and building my own knowledge about the topic so as to create the best possible questionnaire to achieve my goals. This phase involved creating an item pool from which I would retrieve the final questionnaire items (see also, Dörnyei 2003). I then established the item sequence. This was set from easy to difficult, meaning that the cognitive effort required to answer the third question was higher than the one needed for the first. I did so in the hope of giving

the students both a pleasant first impression of the questionnaire and a sense that the subsequent questions could be completed as rapidly as the first. In stark contrast, for the second project I used an adapted version of William's (2011) learning log. I decided to do this because I realised that the amount of data obtained from the open-response questionnaires used in the first project started to decrease over time, with responses including shorter, not-so-thoughtful answers and even unanswered questions. Therefore, I found myself obliged to generate a friendlier, open-response questionnaire that would be quicker to complete while still allowing me to obtain thoughtful and relevant responses, especially at the emotional level, which is the dimension of engagement that I most wanted to tap into because it is less observable than the other dimensions (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for a discussion). In this regard, William's proposal seemed an appealing alternative due to the fact that it encourages an autonomous approach to reflecting on one's learning by letting students choose three prompts they feel inclined to answer (see Appendix E, for a sample).

It must be noted that both open-response questionnaires underwent a series of changes over each project, not just from project to the other. Some of these changes affected the wording of questions while others comprised an alteration to the structure itself, including the order, nature or number of questions. To illustrate, in the first project I found that some students, in the three-point rating scale provided, were inserting a fourth option because they did not want to sit on the fence. This motivated me to shift to a four-point scale to see how the students would react. They reacted well, as there were no more instances of students drawing an extra option.

Another example of this is in the open-response questionnaires used in the second project. I realised that most students were choosing positive prompts (e.g., what they liked) rather than negative prompts (e.g., what they did not like). This made me think about what would happen if they had been forced to choose at least one negative

prompt. Interestingly, I thereafter realised that a significant number of students did not feel negatively towards the project at that particular time and for that reason they were only choosing the positive prompts. This alleviated my concern.

As a final example, in the case of the open-response questionnaire for the first project, I noticed that the feedback dialogue that I attempted with the students, in response to their questionnaires, did not work efficiently. That is, providing written feedback to each student for each questionnaire was a laborious task for which I would not obtain much in return. Generally speaking, the students would read my comments and answer my questions but this did not seem to have a significant impact on their performance. Moreover, in most cases, I would end up writing the same comments for each student because they all reported similar concerns in their reflections.

Regarding the questionnaire items, these were concise and succinct. Also, I formulated them so that they could easily be understood, with the hope that the students would not be discouraged from answering (Brown 2009). Hence, I stayed away from two-part questions, negative questions, and technical language. Furthermore, I avoided including biased questions. As mentioned above, the questions were not completely open-ended but consisted of some prompts to help the students answer the questions. This decision was partly made due to the low level of reflection I witnessed over the first term; it seemed to me that the students sometimes did not know what to say when they were asked to reflect on something.

On a final note, as this questionnaire was specifically designed for those who had been through the project experience I was unable to pilot the questionnaire. Nevertheless, before distributing it I trialled it with some of my colleagues, focusing on the characteristics cited by Dörnyei (2003: 64), amongst which are: the number, difficulty, clarity and length of the questions, appropriate wording, and the overall appearance of the questionnaire. From the trial runs I obtained valuable feedback regarding these

aspects, and I was also able to see the kind of data that could possibly emerge from the questionnaires — since I asked my colleagues to write out their responses. All this was very helpful in refining the instrument. Similarly, the on-going administration of the open-response questionnaires also allowed me to treat each administration as an opportunity to pilot the questionnaires and continue to improve them. The next sub-section describes the last research instrument I employed in this study, namely the after-project questionnaires.

4.4.4 After-Project Questionnaires

The last data collection instrument employed in this investigation is after-project questionnaires. I used this type of questionnaire with a qualitative intention in mind. This means that its purpose was, in some cases, to help develop other instruments; while in others it was to substantiate the explanatory power of other qualitative data (see Riazi & Candlin, 2014, for a discussion of the complementarity and development purposes of research methods). In other words, I used after-project questionnaires to get a first impression of the ability of the projects to achieve ASEC engagement along with the contextual factors that contributed to increasing or diminishing it; data which I would in turn use, not only to better interpret the information obtained by means of the after-project group interviews, but also to accurately design and conduct these interviews.

Thus, the after-project questionnaires offered me an opportunity to rapidly obtain a parallel account of events that would serve as the baseline for the development of future data collection instruments, and the better understanding of their findings. This satisfied the purpose of the qualitative triangulation proposed for this study (cf. 4.4), which sought to make every attempt to increase the validity and reliability of the findings of this investigation — and herein lies the reason for using this instrument in addition to the others. The Table below gives an overview of the questionnaires administered in this study, along with their characteristics:

Table 4.3: Questionnaire types and characteristics

Questionnaire type	Participants	Aim
After-project questionnaire n.1	17	Explore the impact of the first project on students' ASEC engagement (if any) and learn about what facilitated or diminished it.
After-project questionnaire n.2	17	Explore the impact of the second project on students' ASEC engagement (if any) and learn about what facilitated or diminished it.

Regarding administration, the after-project questionnaires were handed out at the end of the lesson right after the project was over, and along with a brief explanation of the purpose and significance of the questionnaire, both for them (i.e., benefits of reflection for learning) and for me (i.e., helping me to improve education). Following Oppenheim's (1992) suggestions on questionnaire group administration to minors, I asked another adult (i.e., Pamela) to be present (and even help me with the distribution) to ensure that the students would fill out the questionnaire by themselves without chatting or copying. To increase honesty in student responses, since they felt more at ease when dealing with an outsider like me (as the interview data will show in Chapters Six and Seven), before starting the questionnaire I reminded the students that I was the only one who would access the data, just in case they thought that the presence of Pamela implied otherwise (see Dörnyei 2003, for a discussion on emphasising confidentiality). In fact, to illustrate my point, towards the end of the questionnaire I asked Pamela to step outside the class so that I could collect the questionnaires, and answer any questions the students might have regarding the data they had provided. That being said, I have to say that this approach to increase the quality of participant responses in the questionnaire was in fact my backup plan. Originally, I had wanted to bring a member of staff from outside the area of languages to give out the

questionnaires, and then put them in an envelope, which would be signed by a student (Clément et al., 1994). I had thought at the time that such a course of action would release the students from any influence that Pamela might have on their responses, and might also make the participants provide more honest information as a result of the perceived anonymity (Dörnyei 2003). Sadly, on both occasions (i.e., project one and project two) no staff member was available, so it was necessary to resort to the strategy mentioned above.

Regarding the questionnaire design, I paid attention to several format characteristics. Firstly, as recommended by Dörnyei (2003; 2007), I kept it as short as possible. This was an important aspect to consider since I did not want to produce long questionnaires that would discourage participation (Oppenheim 1992; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). With this in mind, I generated questionnaires that did not exceed four pages and would not take more than 30 minutes to complete. In fact, I designed the questionnaires so that they could be answered in less than ten minutes.

In terms of the layout, I tried to produce questionnaires that would look professional and attractive because, as Dörnyei (2003: 89) notes, "respondents are normally willing to spend time and effort on a questionnaire if they believe that they are contributing to a serious investigation". In practical terms, this meant that, on one hand, I opted for a booklet format that would not only make the questionnaires look serious and professional, but also shorter (Dörnyei 2003). On the other hand, I tried to be balanced when using page-full questionnaires so as to avoid looking crowded (ibid.). Finally, to further contribute to improving the respondents' impressions of the questionnaires, I focused on aspects such as providing an orderly layout with well-marked sections or using coloured paper (Dörnyei 2003). With the sequence marking I wanted to convey a sense of visual structure and one of progressing, while with the coloured paper my intention was to further increase the attractiveness of the questionnaires. In addition to

this, I also included some decorations and pictures to make the questionnaires more visually appealing to further encourage respondents to participate (see Appendix F, for a sample).

Focusing now on item design, I drew heavily on established questionnaires guided by the fact that questions that have been empirically validated are more likely to have already gone through refinement process (Dörnyei 2003; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Thus, for the after-project questionnaire, I drew on a variety of sources to compose the questionnaires, especially on questionnaires that had been previously used in studies to measure engagement at the school and classroom levels (e.g., Appleton et al., 2006; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredricks et al., 2005; Greene et al., 2004; Reeve 2013; Walker et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2014). The reason why I leaned on established questionnaires employed to measure engagement at the levels of the school and the classroom is because validated scales at the activity level are still in their early stages (see Greene 2015, for a discussion). As Fredricks and McColskey (2012: 766) point out: "[engagement] measures are rarely worded to reflect specific situations or tasks, making it difficult to examine the extent to which engagement varies across contexts".

Moreover, the after-project questionnaires encompassed different questionnaire items and types. They consisted of close-ended items, which "[did] not require the respondents to produce any free writing; instead, they [were] to choose one of the alternatives, regardless of whether their preferred answer [was] among them" (Dörnyei 2003: 35). The after-project questionnaire encapsulated 35 items while the second one featured 34; these ranged from rating scales to checklists. The rating scales, whose characteristics were explained in the previous section, were mainly used to collect evaluative information on student ASEC engagement and the contextual aspects influencing it. They were assembled into a four-response option to avoid students adopting a neutral position and therefore obliging them to make a choice. I did so because, unlike the open-

response questionnaires, I did not have qualitative data to interpret middle answers in either a positive or a negative light. As for the checklists, which consist of "mark[ing] the items on the list that apply to a particular question" (Dörnyei 2003: 46), they focused of gathering information about student learning, which I considered useful in terms of exploring the relationships between student engagement and subsequent learning.

At the final stage of the questionnaire construction, similar to the open-response questionnaires (cf. 4.4.3), I did not pilot the after-project questionnaires. It was impossible to find a sample group similar to the target group, as only the participants of this investigation did the projects. Nevertheless, this did not stop me from conducting some trial runs with my PhD colleagues that would help towards making alterations and improving the final versions of the questionnaires. In the case of the second after-project questionnaire, I also drew on the experience gained from the administration of the first after-project questionnaire to help me modify the former. Moreover, despite omitting the piloting stage for both questionnaires, their qualitative nature ensured they were still highly suitable instruments. Simply put, since the purpose of the after-project questionnaires was to lay the groundwork in the design of other instruments, as well as provide a parallel, (merely) informative perspective of the social phenomena under study — for the sake of data complementarity — it is my view that the absence of a formal pilot should not be considered a serious threat towards the validity of the data obtained by means of these questionnaires. By the same token, other limitations often associated with questionnaires, such as the superficiality and unreliability of responses (see Dörnyei 2003, for a discussion), should not pose a threat to this study because of the non-quantitative aim of the questionnaires.

4.5 Thematic Analysis

As noted in Section 4.4, this study uses a qualitative approach to data collection partially driven by the desire to meet the demands of current research, which calls for studies that explore engagement from a perspective that seeks in-depth understanding rather than simple explanation. In light of this, in this section I present thematic analysis as the analytical approach adopted in this investigation to achieve such deep understanding, which can be specifically understood as uncovering the potential of the ProE model (if any) for student ASEC engagement.

Although it may seem obvious, it must be stressed that the thematic approach of data analysis only applies to the qualitative data gathered in the study and therefore omits the data obtained in the after-project questionnaires. As previously explained (Section 4.4.4), such questionnaires were only used to complement the qualitative data, as well as to develop other qualitative instruments; for this reason they are not analysed using formal or systematic procedures. In addition, it is also noteworthy that the thematic approach to data analysis only applies to the analysis conducted as a researcher (rather than as a teacher). This is because, as we will see in Chapters Six and Seven, in each research cycle I conduct two separate analyses of the data. The first one is asystematic (i.e., repeated reading of notes and questionnaire results, and listening to the interviews), which I conduct as a teacher to gain a provisional understanding of the results of the ProE model implementation. The second is the systematic analysis of this investigation, to which this section refers.

Thus, thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006: 6), "is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data". Therefore, in this method the researcher essentially immerses him/herself in the qualitative data in order to capture key aspects relevant to the research question(s) (Vaismoradi et al.,

2013). These aspects are then grouped into themes, which are ordered, validated, and analysed in order to produce a report that advances understanding of the studied phenomenon.

Thematic analysis offers a rich array of advantages over similar methods (e.g., content analysis), which is the main reason I opted for this particular method of data analysis. Firstly, thematic analysis is highly recommended for novice researchers like myself because it does not require specific theoretical or technical skills. In fact, as Vaismoradi et al. note (2013: 400), it actually "provides core skills to researchers for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis". Therefore, with this analytical approach, I am less likely to provide a misleading or deceptive account of the data due to my relative inexperience as a researcher. A similar advantage is that thematic analysis is versatile in nature, which makes it appropriate for a wide range of epistemologies and research questions (Vaismoradi et al. 2013). As Braun and Clarke state (2006: 5), "through its theoretical freedom, [thematic analysis] provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complete account of the data". In view of this, thematic analysis seems an essential method to master for my current and future career as a researcher given its applications in different research situations.

In another vein, I would argue that another advantage is that, unlike content analysis, thematic analysis not only looks into what recurs most in the data (i.e., quantification of data) but also considers what might appear relatively insignificant (Spencer et al., 2003; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). As Braun and Clarke (2006: 10) observe, in thematic analysis, "the 'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures — but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question". On another note, thematic analysis also permits the researcher to link the analysis of meaning to the context in which the data is generated (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). This means that in contrast to, for example, conventional content analysis (see

Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), whereby the number of instances across the data is the major determinant of significant meanings (Morgan 1993; Twycross & Shields, 2008), in thematic analysis, specific contexts largely contribute to shaping significant meanings. All this is particularly relevant to this investigation as, firstly, I wish to explore frequent occurrences (i.e., the expected) in addition to what is significant (i.e., the unexpected). Secondly, this being an AR(-like) study that seeks deep understanding, as opposed to qualitative studies that focus on explanation, context warrants special attention if I want to accurately identify, analyse and interpret my research topic.

Having said this, despite all its advantages, I am also aware of the disadvantages that thematic analysis poses — which, as Braun and Clarke (2006: 27) note, "depend more on poorly conducted analyses or inappropriate research question than the method itself". For example, it is often reported that thematic analysis is more descriptive than interpretative (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013, for a discussion). The reason for this seems to be that it is generally regarded as having a somewhat inductive (data-driven) nature that can hardly move from describing characteristics of a phenomenon to describing how, when, or why those characteristics occurred. Nevertheless, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, this disadvantage can be easily offset by anchoring the data analysis to an existing theoretical framework or, in other words, using a predominantly deductive approach. Thus, in order to increase the interpretative power of this method I carried out the coding process from a primarily deductive or theory-driven approach (see Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This form of thematic analysis, "tend[s] to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and it is thus more analyst-driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 12). Consequently, in this study I code the data for the research question, trying to fit the codes, in most instances, into coding frames derived from existing theory. In addition to this, where necessary, I supplement the deductive approach with a data-driven or inductive approach, meaning that I also embrace emerging patterns even

though they have little in connection with existing theory (Kondracki et al., 2002; Mayring 2002).

My approach to the data analysis, then, is from the perspective of coding for the research question. To do so I rely on existing theory as well as on the meaningful insights that the data supplies, regardless of whether these fit into pre-existing coding frames. I suggest that a theory-driven approach, supported by a data-driven approach, should allow me to overcome the drawbacks of each approach and also increase trustworthiness (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). To clarify, at times, inductive approaches may lead to loss of focus and direction due to focusing only on the emerging areas (see Shamsini 2012, for a discussion). Here deductive approaches can help connect all the emerging themes. Furthermore, in deductive analysis, according to Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1283) "[…R]esearchers [can] approach the data with an informed but, nonetheless, strong bias. Hence, researchers might be more likely to find evidence that is supportive rather than nonsupportive of a theory". Moreover, "an overemphasis on the theory can blind researchers to contextual aspects of the phenomenon" (ibid.). An inductive approach, then, should be useful in allowing themes to flow from the data, which, in turn, should lead towards a richer and more credible analysis.

In view of the preceding, for the analysis process I follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis (Table 4.5). It is noteworthy that these phases mostly refer to inductive analysis approaches, since they mainly help researchers extract final themes from the raw data. Naturally, where the themes are already established by, for example, theoretical frameworks, some of the phases of the list can be omitted. That being said, I would like to state that four different analyses are conducted to answer this study's research question (i.e., the impact of the ProE model on student ASEC engagement) in each of the study's two research cycles. Three of them are deductive (i.e., global analysis of ASEC engagement, temporal analysis of ASEC engagement, and analysis of

the facilitators of engagement) whereas the remaining one is inductive (i.e., analysis of the inhibitors of engagement).

Table 4.4: Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps of thematic analysis

1. Transcribing and familiarising with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis is a comprehensive and rigorous method for conducting data analysis. It treats analysis as an on-going organic process in which recurrent immersions into the data from diverse angles are required (i.e., comprehensive). Consequently, through this method it is also possible to provide a systematic, consistent, and coherent account of the data (i.e., rigorous) — whose absence in qualitative methods is much criticised (see Holloway & Todres, 2003 and Vaismoradi et al., 2013, for a discussion). By adopting this multi-level approach to thematic analysis I should be able to produce a high-quality report that would hopefully provide new knowledge and understanding.

Thus, I would begin by transcribing the verbal (interviews) as well as the written data (open-response questionnaires). With the latter I mean digitising and preparing the handwritten texts produced by the students for subsequent analysis. For the transcripts, since this is not an investigation that focuses on language use or on speech functionality, but rather on meaning as already discussed in 4.4.1.4, I would concentrate on providing a thorough, orthographic account of all verbal utterances, which shall represent the

original source as accurately as possible (see Appendix B). Following this, I would then familiarise myself with the data. In Braun and Clarke's (2006) opinion, this means repeatedly reading the previously transcribed data and note taking. This step would allow me to obtain an overview of the data, thus guiding me through the rest of the analysis (Polit & Beck, 2004).

After gaining a general idea of the contents of the data, I would move on to produce the initial codes, or groups of meaningful information, as Boyatzis (1998: 63) defines them. As my approach would be both (predominantly) deductive and inductive, I would code for the research question using a crosscutting approach that would go beyond my theoretical stance. This means that in addition to coding driven by the theory I would also generate codes for salient features of the data even though they harmonise little with the theoretical approach directing the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Finally, the coding would be done using the software programme NVivo (see Kelle 1997; Seale 2000, for a discussion) as this seems to be the leading software for qualitative data analysis and also the one for which training is available at the University of Warwick (see Illustration 4.1 below).

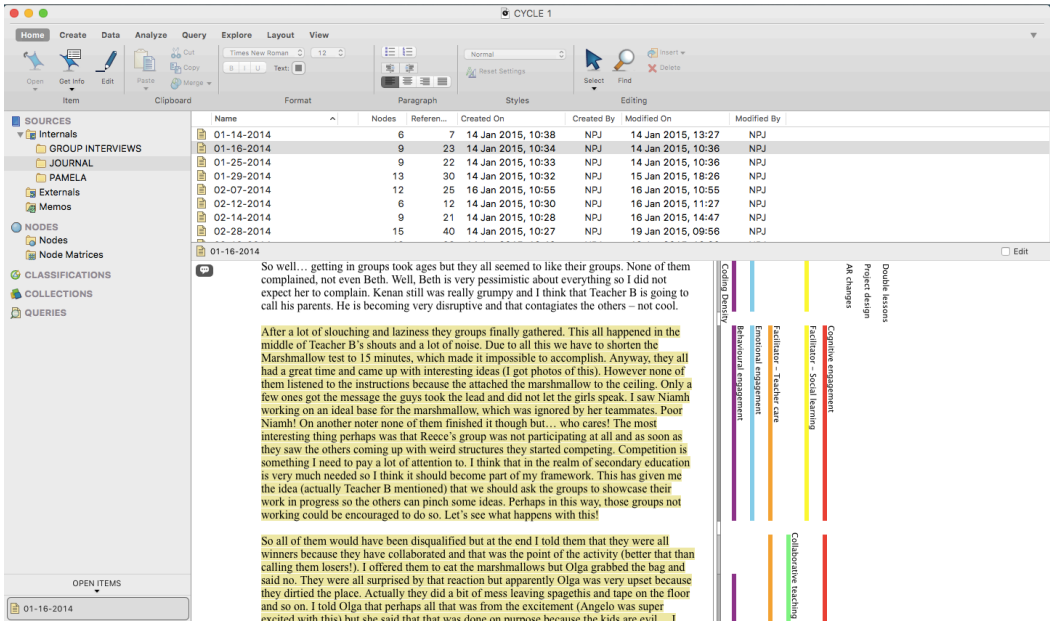

Illustration 4.1: Example of coding using NVivo

Having coded the data, the next stage would be to search for themes. This step would entail generating a provisional list of potential themes and sub-themes from the identified codes, which would be organised into a hierarchical structure (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Morse & Field, 1995) that would be refined in the following stage. It is noteworthy that this stage will be omitted in cases in which the codes, and therefore the themes are already provided by existing theory. Next, the fourth stage consists of fine-tuning the different themes until a thematic map is devised. This would be carried out at two levels. Firstly, I would read all the extracts under each theme to identify potential, coherent patterns. In the absence of such coherence, I would rework the theme until its extracts fit with the idea portrayed by the theme. Secondly, once I am satisfied with the themes, I would go through the entire data set in order to ascertain whether the themes accurately represent the contents of the data. Similarly, in the event that the themes are not coherent with the data I would further review and refine my coding. Finally, I would produce a thematic map of my data, which, although incomplete, should satisfactorily represent the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (Illustration 4.2).

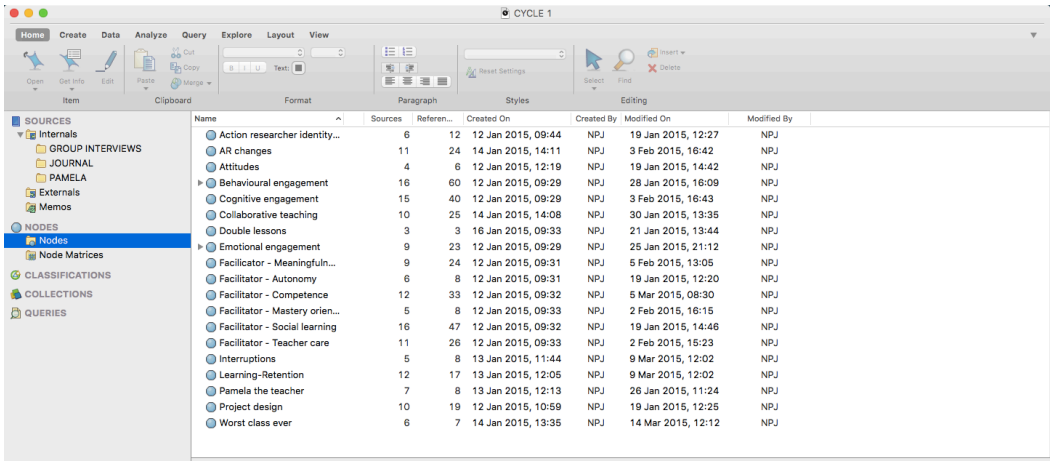

Illustration 4.2: Initial thematic map in NVivo

The next step would be to define and label the themes, especially those that emerge from the data. For this, I would again go through the extracts in order to see whether the working names given to each theme accurately represent the subject of each theme. Here I would make sure that labels are not too broad, too diverse or too complex to understand (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As part of this process, I would also define and label the sub-themes using the same method described above. Having done that, I would provide the final labels for my themes, which should be clear, sharp and straight to the point (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final step of thematic analysis is to produce the final report. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 23), this consists of "tell[ing] the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis". Accordingly, in my reporting of the data I would always try to use vivid and clear extracts from my data to illustrate my points and/or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, to avoid engaging in the act of cherry picking (see Morse 2010, for a discussion) and to thus increase the credibility of my reporting, when possible, I would use more than one extract from different sources (Shamsini 2012); I would account for the deviant cases encountered in the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005); and I would use appropriate rhetorical descriptors in order to demonstrate that a theme really exists in the data

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then I would weave all of these together in an analytic narrative, relevant to my research question, which would go beyond a mere description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the aforementioned steps, then, should allow me to provide a convincing narrative illustrating the data's veracity.

4.6 Research Ethics

When researching individuals in education it is expected that ethical issues will emerge at every stage of the research sequence (Flewitt 2005). To illustrate, we may face ethical dilemmas when negotiating initial consent with gatekeepers (e.g., deciding on the amount of information that should be disclosed to the participants about our research); when collecting data (e.g., selecting appropriate methods of data collection that bring no mental or physical harm to the participants); or even when sharing our findings with the world (e.g., respecting the anonymity of the participants) (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Thus, the social sciences researcher is unavoidably destined to face and solve a fair amount of unforeseen moral predicaments, which naturally emanate from the complexities entailed in researching human beings (Cohen et al., 2005). Furthermore, ethical issues are particularly more relevant in qualitative research since it:

> […O]ften intrudes more into the human private sphere: it is inherently interested in people's personal views and often targets sensitive or intimate matters. (Dörnyei 2007: 64)

In view of this, the literature reveals at least two major courses of action that the social sciences researcher can undertake in order to establish a robust ethical framework and therefore reduce the number of ethical issues that may unavoidably arise. The first action would relate to obtaining formal consent and cooperation of the potential research participants (Dörnyei 2007). The second would concern achieving a trade-off between "the demands placed on [researchers] as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and their subjects' rights and values potentially threatened by the research." (Cohen et al., 2005: 254). Taking this into consideration, next I describe the strategies employed and

decisions made in order to apply the two key approaches to ethical research described above. This involves, 1) examining the process of negotiating and obtaining informed consent for my yearlong investigation with a Year 9 group of Spanish language learners at a school in England (procedural ethics); and 2) discussing the strategies I used to attain a harmonious balance between the interests of my research and a humane, thoughtful treatment of my participants (ethics in practice).

4.6.1 Procedural Ethics

In most of mainstream social research, the informed consent is the bedrock of the so-called ethical procedure (Cohen et al., 2005; Dörnyei 2007; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1976). We could say that this is mainly because the informed consent unlocks the figurative gate leading to the research project — of course, for studies in which informed consent is required (see Cohen et al., 2005, for a discussion). Therefore, in social research, and especially in qualitative studies such as this one, we habitually need persons to agree to work with us (Dörnyei 2007). Lack of consent, as can be expected, might severely affect our research or even worse, prevent it entirely. It is for this reason then that crafting a reasonably informed consent becomes an essential duty for the researcher, as we need to minimize the amount of people opting out of the research study (Cohen et al., 2005; Dörnyei 2007).

However, the informed consent is much more than our passport towards the fulfilment of our research intentions. It also lays the foundation for a future, fruitful collaboration between the researcher and the research subjects. This relationship is constructed around relevant and clear, factual information provided by the researcher, typically in the form of a consent form, which the potential study participants need to endorse (Cohen et al., 2005; Flewitt 2005). Once consent is obtained, a contractual relationship is therefore established between the researcher and the subject, by which both parties will abide. In practical terms, this would mean that the informed consent would become a ‘two-edged

security blanket' that would protect the researcher in his/her pursuit of the truth; and in turn, it would also safeguard the participants' personal rights and values from unethical practices.

The amount of information provided for a reasonably informed consent may vary according to the situation. Nevertheless, there seems to be broad consensus on a somewhat universal modus operandi which could be summarised as: the researcher, whatever the nature of the research, has the obligation to inform the potential participants, at least, about the possible risks and consequences of participating in the research, as well as about their rights to self-determination and privacy. In the light of these considerations, drawing on Dörnyei (2007) and other sources (AERA 2001; Cohen et al., 2005), a list is presented below with key points to be covered in order to achieve a minimal level of 'informed-ness' for our participants (and/or other gatekeepers).

Table 4.5: Guidelines for a reasonably informed consent (adapted from Dörnyei 2007: 69)

Right to be informed about…
1. The objectives of the investigation.
2. The purpose for which the data will be used.
3. The tasks the participants will be expected to perform during the study.
4. The possible risks and consequences of participating in the research.
5. The extent to which the data will be held confidential.
6. Their right to withdraw from the study at any point.
7. The benefits to be expected.
8. Their right to ask questions concerning the nature of the research.

Having introduced the concept of the informed consent and emphasised its high relevance in conducting an ethical study and its key components, informed consent was sought in this study across four levels:

- At the institution level
- At the parental/guardian's level
- At the student's level
- At the teacher's level

The rationale for the need for diverse informed consents lies in the fact that this research is conducted within a school-based context and with minors (14-year olds), and for that reason, in addition to the institution, I need to obtain two additional consents from various authority figures (Dörnyei 2007). As Cohen et al. (2005: 52) put it:

> Seeking informed consent with regard to minors involves two stages. First, researchers consult and seek permission from those adults responsible for the prospective subjects; and second, they approach the young people themselves.

Furthermore, since I aimed to collaborate with an MFL teacher (Pamela) in conducting my research, for the reasons explained in 4.2.2, I needed to gain her consent, which would allow me to capture a different perspective of the same context.

At the institutional level, in order to embark on school-based research with Year 9 Spanish language learners I had to, firstly, gain access and acceptance from the organisation in question, namely a religious, state-funded school in England. To this end, I considered most of the steps encompassed in the negotiation access checklist outlined by Bell (1991) and adapted by Cohen et al. (2005).

Table 4.6: Negotiation access checklist (Cohen et al. 2005: 57)

1. Clear official channels by formally requesting permission to carry out your investigation as soon as you have an agreed project outline.
2. Speak to the people who will be asked to co-operate.
3. Submit the project outline to the head, if you are carrying out a study in your or another educational institution.
4. Decide what you mean by anonymity and confidentiality.
5. Decide whether participants will receive a copy of the report and/or see drafts or interview transcripts.
6. Inform participants what is to be done with the information they provide.
7. Prepare an outline of intentions and conditions under which the study will be carried out to hand to the participants.
8. Be honest about the purpose of the study and about the conditions of the research.
9. Remember that people who agree to help are doing you a favour.
10. Never assume 'it will be all right'. Negotiating access is an important stage of your investigation.

Therefore, once I had drawn up a precise outline of my research, my first move was to speak to the MFL teacher, Pamela, with the purposes of knowing the extent to which my research project would complement the school's plans for improving education.

Counting on the support and cooperation of Pamela, I then made a formal approach to the school's head teacher via e-mail whereby I introduced myself and outlined the aims and scope of my research. There are two practical reasons why I contacted the head of the school with a view to negotiating access — instead of other school authorities such as the head of languages. The first was in line with Festinger and Katz's (1966) recommendation of referring directly to the top of an organisation at the outset of the investigation with the aim of avoiding (extra) layers of hierarchy, and also increasing the likelihood for a favourable decision. According to the authors, it is likely that heads can

be more open-minded and more willing to co-operate than those situated lower down in the hierarchical structure due to insecurity reasons. The second reason, was because Pamela recommended this course of action, believing that it would maximise my opportunities to gain permission to undertake my research at the school.

On receiving a positive e-mail response from the head teacher, the negotiation process for informed consent began. Before making contact with the head teacher in person to discuss my research plans, and respecting the guidelines of Cohen et al., I (drew up and) sent the head teacher an outline of my research giving "as much detail as possible about the aims, nature and procedures of the research as is appropriate" (2005: 55). In addition to this, I added extra information regarding the benefits that my research could bring to the school and to those involved in it — an idea that is favoured in Bell's (1991) conditions for a school-based research project. These are the topics that were covered in the project outline:

- Broad aims and scope of my research
- Potential benefits of my research to the school
- My role within the school for the data collection period
- Processes associated with the learners' involvement
- Methodology and methods of data collection
- Ethical concerns

Next, I arranged a meeting with the head teacher to request the institute's approval for the study. I reviewed the points raised in the email sent detailing the project outline leaving room for questions. I must say that the negotiation process was handled with extreme care. In it, I discussed my research plans in an informed, accessible and honest manner, constantly highlighting my transparent approach to data collection, and trying to build cooperation and trust. In addition, as suggested by Cohen et al. (2005), I also

tried to cause a positive impression by coming across as a competent and reliable researcher capable of delivering my objectives.

Having come to an agreement, I developed an informed consent form to formalise the negotiation, which was submitted at the following meeting. The consent form was designed following the guidelines for a reasonable informed consent included in Table 4.6 above. However, it is noteworthy that regarding point four (i.e., possible risks of participating in my research), due to the fact that no potential risks of my research were foreseen at this stage I decided to omit this in the form. By signing this form, the head teacher granted me access to the premises in order to conduct my research under the parameters negotiated. However, this document was of a purely informative nature and did not constitute any commitment of participation on the part of the school (because of the right to refuse to take part) or a commitment to comply with all the terms identified. Lastly, I also presented the head teacher with a copy of the informed consent form for us with the participants. This was done for the purposes of transparency and trustworthiness. The negotiation process concluded with the disclosure of a DBS criminal record check that would enable me to work with, and research minors.

Considering now the parental-guardian level, as recommended by Cohen et al. (2005), having gained institutional approval, I contacted the parents/guardians by formal post, seeking consent for their children to participate in my research. This was also the procedure agreed with the head teacher in our second meeting. In the letter I specified that lack of response before a particular date would be taken as consent. I applied this strategy in order to ensure the maximum amount of positive responses, as mentioned in Dörnyei (2007). Moreover, to ensure that all parents would read the letter, Pamela agreed to remind them of it at the first parents' evening of the year. Similarly to the negotiation process at the institutional level, I followed the guidelines in Table 4.6 to compose a reasonably informed consent form. Nevertheless, this time I especially

focused on the points regarding the protection of the children's well-being, so that the parents/guardians could fully comprehend the situation they were putting their children into — and hopefully, help them feel more at ease.

Once parental/guardian informed consent was obtained, informed consent was then sought at the student level (see Cohen et al., 2005). Agreeing with Alderson and Morrow (2004), minors under 16 can usually sufficiently understand what is being proposed to them; therefore, they should be consulted for consent. I therefore distributed an informed consent form to each potential participant, which they were asked to sign (Dörnyei 2007). I did so prior to the pre-model implementation interviews on a one-on-one basis (cf. 4.4.1.1). This form very clearly and simply explained the contents of Table 4.6, focusing especially on the students' responsibilities in the research and how anonymity and confidentiality would be handled — which I would later emphasise in person. It should be noted however that the form did not fully disclose my research aims so as to ensure the collection of naturalistic data, and also to avoid response bias (Wiles et al., 2006). Prior to signing the form, students were given time to reflect on the information given, to ask questions, and in cases of perceived mistrust or self-doubt, I showed the students samples of reported qualitative data so that they could get a sense of what their data would look like in my thesis. (cf. Flewitt 2005).

Finally, I also sought consent from Pamela so as to benefit from the content of our exchanges, or informal interviews (cf. 4.4.1.3). The consent form that she signed was very similar in content and structure to the one given to the students, although more information was provided. Similarly to the students, I asked Pamela to sign the form after having explained it to her, and given her some time to read it through (i.e., a week) and raise any questions or concerns she might have had. In her case, the issue of bias did not arise since she was already aware of my intentions.

4.6.2 Ethics in Practice

As a researcher working in the area of education, like many others (Dörnyei 2007; Flewitt 2005; Punch 2013), I opine that any research study should be driven by the benefits that it can bring to both the participants and the society as a whole. Similarly, I also believe that research involving qualitative methods of inquiry, as far as possible, should only be pursued if the welfare of the participants can be ensured. That said, in this study I followed a code of ethical practice that aligns with the aforementioned moral principles, which can essentially be summarised as trying to strike the balance between:

a) Pursuing my research in order to advance theoretical and applied knowledge in our society (Cohen et al., 2005; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1976).
b) Protecting the participants from being harmed in any way, and also ensuring that this research benefits them in some way (Dörnyei 2007) — even if this should affect the impact of my research (Price 1996).

Regarding my ethical stance associated with the development of science, in accordance with the official British Education Research Guidelines (BERA 2004), I adopted an objective, transparent, and unbiased approach to the data, and a respectful tone in its reporting. Additionally, the overall research, together with the data obtained, was safely stored in my personal password-protected computer, an external password-protected hard-drive, and a personal password-protected folder in Dropbox (an online storage facility). Furthermore, I would only make use of the data for its originally determined purposes (Data Collection Act, 1998), namely my thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications and/or conference presentations. Finally, when ethical dilemmas arose, I consulted my supervisor(s) (Reynolds 1979).

Moreover, in order to protect the wellbeing of my research subjects, I treated all participants equally and with the same respect; and I never did anything to cause

physical or psychological harm (see BERA 2004, for a discussion). I also unreservedly kept an open dialogue with the participants throughout the data collection period. Furthermore, I did not reveal the identity of the participants or any information that might make participants identifiable and/or traceable (BERA 2004; Cohen et al., 2005) — despite the fact that arguably absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed (Kaiser 2009; Walford 2005). To protect their personal identities, I encouraged participants to choose a pseudonym by which they would like to be identified in my thesis, and also in potential publications/presentations derived from my research. Finally, once my thesis is complete I would revisit the school to show the participants how I eventually used the data and to thank them for their participation (cf. Flewitt 2005). As Dörnyei (2007: 68) points out:

> Unfortunately, it is all too common to see a 'slash and burn' research strategy whereby investigators use their participants without offering anything in return and as soon as the data has been gathered they disappear. I some cases, saying a warm and salient 'thank you' may be enough.

To conclude this section, I will discuss the potential benefits of my research to the participants. I envisaged benefits both at the student and school levels. Firstly, students were expected to benefit directly from the implementation of the ProE model. This is because the model would seek to provide them with pleasant classroom experiences over the academic year. Secondly, Pamela was also expected to benefit from this intervention, since it would allow her to learn and experience new ways of teaching and learning and consequently, potentially develop as a professional. Finally, the school would also benefit from this research by means of tailor-made workshops upon completion of the study, and also by receiving mention in all future scientific publications and presentations derived from this research, unless otherwise preferred.

Chapter Five: Action Research Cycle Zero

5.1 Introduction

The following chapters (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) focus on the implementation process of the ProE model. This particular chapter is concerned with the preliminary work done before its implementation (5.2). I describe the actions undertaken before the initial implementing, and what led to take those actions. Chapters Six and Seven concentrate on the action research approach undertaken in this investigation. As previously mentioned, this consists of two research cycles that seek to ascertain the potential of the ProE model for student ASEC engagement in learning activities. Each research cycle corresponds to an implementation of the ProE model using a language-learning project, resulting in a total of two applications of the model in this study.

Furthermore, each research cycle follows the same structure, which logically corresponds to the four essential stages of action research, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Thus, as discussed in 4.3, in the planning phase, I describe the characteristics of the language-learning project designed under the parameters of the ProE model. In the acting stage, I provide a step-by-step description of the project implementation. In the observing stage, I report on the data collection process, which includes what data was collected and how. Finally, at the reflecting stage, I develop the data analysis and discussion of the findings concerning the impact of the language-learning project, and thus, the ProE model on student ASEC engagement.

Moreover, the reflecting stage is separated into three parts. Given that this study adopts an action research approach (cf. 4.3), the first part concentrates on my experience as an action researcher. Consequently, I report on the findings of the research cycle and

provide directions for future courses of action. My recommendations are based on an asystematic analysis (practitioner account) of the data that was conducted while undertaking the research. The reason for this asystematic analysis is time-related. In the first cycle, I only had a few days between the first and the second cycle; therefore, I was only able to analyse the data in an informal way (i.e., repeated reading of notes and questionnaire results, and listening to the interviews) and take actions based on the findings of such analysis. In the second cycle, however, as the study was concluded and no further action was needed, I felt that recording my assessment of the ProE model implementation in the form of a reflection at the end of the research cycle would suffice. A systematic analysis of the data would then follow for the reasons I specify next.

The second part of the reflective stage of action research is therefore concerned with systematic analyses of the data from an outsider's perspective (i.e., researcher account). These are analyses that were conducted after the research was completed and correspond with the global and temporal analysis of ASEC engagement and the analysis of the facilitators and inhibitors of engagement. My rationale for systematic analyses of the data is that, in addition to time constraints, an insider's perspective (i.e., practitioner researcher), despite being essential to understanding the phenomenon under investigation might not provide a sufficient understanding of the events (see Denscombe 2010, for a discussion). That is, relying solely on insider knowledge may be problematic since the practitioner may be unable to detect key factors because of being too involved in the research context. For example, an insider may overlook important elements because s/he deems them too mundane or too obvious. In this respect, an outsider's perspective (i.e., systematic analysis or analyses) becomes necessary to complement the practitioner's insights and thus provide a more complete account of the events. As Denscombe (2010: 80) puts it:

> The outsider 'expert' may not have the 'right' answer, but can possibly offer an alternative perspective that can help the practitioner to gain new insights into the nature of the practical

> problem. So, although action research respects the knowledge of the practitioners, it would be rather naive to assume that practitioners' knowledge – of itself – provides all the answers.

The third and final part of the reflective stage is concerned with the discussion of the findings. There, I state my interpretations and opinions of the results of the systematic analyses and connect them to existing theory and research in order to answer this study's research question (i.e., the impact of the ProE model on student ASEC engagement in learning activities). I also contrast the results obtained by the asystematic analyses (i.e., practitioner account) with the systematic analyses (i.e., researcher account) to obtain a much clearer picture of the results obtained by the systematic analyses.

5.2 Preliminary Work

The preliminary work phase corresponds to the time period in which I, with Pamela's help, prepared the students and myself for the investigation (see Table 5.1). I felt it necessary to devote the first academic term to preparing the students both academically (and emotionally) for the implementation of the ProE model, given that its implementation included elements such as, group work and/or autonomous work, to which the students were unaccustomed (cf. 4.2.1), I thereby hoped to increase the likelihood of the model's success, i.e., by limiting the interference of the absence of academic skills or negative dispositions. To this end, I implemented several activities over the first school term that, amongst other things (i.e., the use of technology, critical thinking, public speaking, etc.) included a significant amount of group work and student responsibility, as research shows that these particular elements of the ProE model need a certain amount of training (e.g., Fredricks 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Reeve 1998).

Moreover, the preliminary stage served as a bonding period between my research participants and me. As the literature suggests (Bryman 2012; Dörnyei 2007; Richards 2003), it seems that the key to decent qualitative research is that participants trust the

researcher so that, they open up to him/her during data collection activities (e.g., interviews) thereby allowing the researcher to obtain more truthful information (cf. 4.4.1). This seems particularly true when dealing with adolescents (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). As can be expected, establishing a good rapport with the students and gaining their trust may be a time-intensive process. Thus, I decided to use the first school term to building a positive researcher-student relationship that would help me with my ultimate research goal: that of obtaining data that truthfully explains the results of the implementation of the ProE model.

Finally, this preliminary phase also helped me feel comfortable with the classroom environment and the participants. During this time, I got to know the students at a personal level, and Pamela at a professional level. Thus, since this was a new classroom environment for me, I felt that it would be appropriate to spend some time getting accustomed to working with the students and with Pamela prior to the implementation of the ProE model. I believed that spending some time familiarising myself with my research context, both as a researcher and a teacher, would allow for a smoother implementation of the model. This would allow me to be better able to understand the students, their behaviours and needs. I would also potentially be better able to reduce issues inherent to co-teaching that could obstruct the implementation of the model. Consequently, I tried to learn as much as possible about the students through informal chats and interviews (cf. 4.4.1); and I tried to gain experience of working with Pamela.

Table 5.1: Details of the preliminary work phase

Duration	Begin	End	Data collected
13 Weeks	3 September 2013	12 December 2013	1. Pair interviews: Interviews at the beginning of the cycle to assess the initial student-attitudes towards foreign language learning (N=19). I conducted a total of eight pair interviews (plus one, one-on-one interview) in November 2013 (before my intervention). 2. Interviews with Pamela: These interviews were informal discussions where we mostly reflected on the progress of the students and the group's issues and challenges. 3. Research Journal: I kept a diary in which I documented my daily experience as a researcher teacher.

Chapter Six: Action Research Cycle One (C1)

6.1 Introduction

The sections that follow expand on the four stages of AR of the first research cycle conducted in this study: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

6.2 Action Research C1: Planning

As discussed in 4.3, at this stage a plan was devised to ascertain whether the ProE model could stimulate ASEC engagement in learning activities. It involved implementing a language-learning project with a group of Year 9 language learners (cf. 4.2.1).

The theme of the first project was "Writing a domestic tale for Mexican schoolchildren". This project consisted of writing collaborative fictional stories in Spanish that discussed several cultural aspects of the UK, including geography, life and work, local heroes, and environmental issues. These stories would then be sent to a group of lower-intermediate learners of English in a collaborating school in Mexico at the end of the project. This collaborative initiative was arranged before the project was implemented, with the expectation that the Mexican schoolchildren would do likewise i.e., write a domestic tale for British schoolchildren. The Mexican students would therefore write and send their stories, written in English, focusing on cultural aspects of Mexico, including food, holidays, music, and clothing. Their stories would then serve as models for my students as well as promote greater intercultural awareness (i.e., learning from another country through literature).

The academic objectives of the project were twofold. Firstly, it aimed to promote meaningful language learning by having students write their tales in the target language for real people. Secondly, I also wanted the students to develop *21st-century skills* (i.e.,

collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity) (see Boss et al., 2013, for a discussion), and, especially, greater competence in intercultural communication (see Byram 1997, for a discussion). It must be said that Pamela and I worked on most of the linguistic components prior to the implementation, during the autumn term (cf. 5.2). It was therefore expected that the students would tap into that knowledge and build upon it throughout the project experience (i.e., learning by doing).

Additionally, the project also had intentional cross-curricular links to concepts in other subjects of the national curriculum such as Geography and English. Regarding applications to Geography, as part of the introductory session to the project, students examined the geography of Mexico, learned and wrote about the geography of the UK. Regarding English, students were asked to tap into their knowledge of storytelling, which includes aspects such as textual coherence and cohesion.

6.3 Action Research C1: Acting

The acting stage of the cycle consisted of following through with the proposed plan. Although the project was initially designed to last for seven weeks, it was eventually extended to eleven due to interruptions that will be discussed in upcoming sub-sections. In numerical terms, this means that the project took 22 hours of class time to accomplish. It started with a one-hour session in which we introduced the students to the project, discussing most of its structure. Then we showed them a video in which the Mexican schoolchildren introduced themselves and stated the topics they wanted my students to include in their stories. By means of a short questionnaire, my students, in turn, chose the topics they wanted the Mexican schoolchildren to write about. After the introduction, came the grouping process. The students were placed in their new groups, assigned by Pamela and me, for some team-building activities. Next, while maintaining the groups we moved on to the brainstorming phase. Here the students had to come up

with original ideas for their stories and subsequently share them with the rest of the class for approval. For this, we provided the necessary training for effective brainstorming. To finalise the preliminary phase of the project, the students were given a folder that included the project calendar and the project handbook. The former contained all the information related to the project such as, for example, the curricular objectives, the steps of the project, the grading system (i.e., criterion-referenced), as well as recommendations to meet the criteria of the project. All these elements were also explained in the class. The following sessions dealt with the writing process. In these sessions we would combine homework correction, mini lessons (when necessary) in relation to either content or skills needed for the project (e.g., how to look up words in the dictionary), and group work. Moreover, in this phase of the project I also provided feedback on the on-going students' reflections (cf. 4.4.3). Finally, although a final presentation was planned at the end of the project, due to time limitations, and other circumstances that I discuss below, the project was curtailed upon submission of student narratives.

6.4 Action Research C1: Observing

This step of AR consists of documenting the results of the informed action. Thus, in order to document the extent of the impact of the ProE model on student engagement, I made use of several instruments, as can be seen in the following Table:

Table 6.1: Description of data collection in Cycle One

AR Cycle	Duration	Begins	Ends	Data collected
Cycle One	11 Weeks	6 January 2014	2 May 2014	1. After-project questionnaires (N=17): These data provided an initial understanding of student ASEC engagement as well as the factors that promoted and diminished it in the present project, and informed approaches for subsequent interviews. 2. Open-response questionnaires: I collected approximately three open-response questionnaires from almost every student participating in the project (N=54), documenting students' views and experiences across the project in terms of engagement. 3. Group interviews with students (N=16): After the project's completion, I conducted four group interviews to assess the engaging nature of the project, and to complement (and verify) the information given in the post-project questionnaires with thick description, in the context of a group conversation. 4. Interviews with Pamela: I conducted two interviews, one before and one after the project, to capture Pamela's overall opinion of student engagement with the project. 5. Research Journal: I kept a diary in which I documented my daily experience as a teacher-researcher throughout the project.

6.5 Action Research C1 Reflecting (I): Practitioner Account

The reflective stage of AR is where the teacher-researcher assesses the overall impact of the intervention to determine future courses of action in subsequent cycles (cf. 4.3). In this particular research cycle, during and after the ProE model implementation, however, I did not have much time to engage in such reflection and consequent action. In light of this, I decided to familiarise myself with all the data pertaining to this cycle, during and after the project. I, therefore, undertook what could be defined as an asystematic analysis of the data (i.e., repeated reading of notes and questionnaire results, and listening to interviews). This was so that I could, at least, identify flaws in the implementation of the ProE model, and design new courses of action to amend such shortcomings as necessary. Ascertaining the extent to which the ProE model had fostered ASEC engagement student engagement, however, would be unfeasible at this stage. This is

because the level of understanding obtained through the asystematic analysis would be not sufficient to reach a sound conclusion in this respect.

Therefore, upon informally analysing the data during and after the implementation of the ProE model as a practitioner-researcher, I identified that there were several, key problematic areas that warranted improvement. These are shown below in a list format alongside a brief discussion on how I approached such issues in order to proceed to a new research cycle:

- Low perceived competence significantly hindered the project

Perhaps the main problem that arose, which data from different sources seem to corroborate is that, overall, the project was too difficult for the students. This had a seemingly substantial impact on student ASEC engagement, since a significant number of students (i.e., mostly the middle and low-achievers) gradually started to give up. Based on the foregoing, for the second project, I went back to the basics and crafted the project for an absolute beginner. Furthermore, to avoid similar reoccurrences, I also became stricter with formative assessment practices for checking for evidence of student understanding (see William 2011), for a description of such practices), which I failed to do regularly (before and) during the first project mainly due to time constraints.

- Empowering students did not work as expected

The idea of starting with a project, which placed a high degree of responsibility on the students, did not seem to work with this particular group of students. It seemed that, the empowered students, did not seem to know how to organise themselves once they were left alone to write up their stories, and this, more often than not, resulted in disengagement. In this respect, in the second project I decided to take one step backwards and adopted a much more structured project in which we laid down the daily, more concise, short-term goals for the students.

- The teacher's level of comfort with the PBL approach

As reported in the data, the teacher did not seem to be entirely comfortable with the project approach adopted for this particular group of students. The idea of empowering this group of difficult students and having them do collaborative work was of serious concern to the teacher as she mentioned a few times in our initial interviews. This concern, likely contributed to her adopting an authoritative role (rather than a facilitative one) from the onset, in an attempt to achieve the same degree of control that would occur in a traditional setting in which the students would neither work in groups nor be empowered. This seemed to result in feelings of uneasiness manifesting itself in student retaliation through (disengagement and) misbehaviour.

In view of the preceding, my recommendation for the second project would then be to meet with Pamela to determine the type of project with which she would be comfortable and that would better fit her teaching style for this particular group. This would be a potential way to address her concerns. From this conversation, the idea of a more structured project, that combined individual (and measurable work) with group work, emerged.

- The teacher-researcher collaboration came to a halt

Unfortunately, due to her challenging workload and difficulty coping with the new demands of collaboration, the teacher gradually detached herself from the project-planning phase. Overall, this seemed to have an indirect, negative effect on student engagement. On occasion, because the teacher did not participate in the planning phase, she would sometimes mix up the order of the elements in the lesson, or omit steps, which would cause her to feel anxious. Consequently, she would become stricter with the students, who would often retaliate by (disengaging and) misbehaving.

For the second project then, I tried to make myself more available during the week, both in terms of times and days, for lesson planning. I also tried to take on some of the workload that Pamela has with our group hoping to get her more involved in the project.

- The teacher-student relationship generally did not seem positive

It seemed that the teacher-student relationship was not positive overall, and this seemed to occasionally contribute to student disengagement. I therefore tried to adapt the project to the existing teaching style as much as possible. I did so by primarily reducing the amount of autonomy as well as the amount of group work given to the students. Furthermore, I also tried discussing with Pamela how poor teacher-student relationships could impact on student engagement.

- Homework not successful

Homework related to the project aimed to fill the gap, by switching from a doing-by-learning to a learning-by-doing approach. However, this did not seem to work as intended, but rather seemed to have a negative impact on engagement. Thus, hoping that this group of students would expand their knowledge through the homework and then apply that to the project seemed to be overly ambitious. Based on my review of the data, it seemed that the homework required students to exercise a high degree of responsibility, which many did not seem to be able to. In addition to this, there seemed to be also a general feeling amongst the students that the homework was too lengthy.

Moreover, after checking the data I concluded that the homework might not have been implemented in a meaningful manner. It seemed that I gave the students the impression that the homework was a standalone element of the project rather than an integral part of it, whose completion was, in fact, necessary to advance the project. This would potentially explain why it seemed that, as seen in the data, students could not establish

the connection between the project and the homework or worse, they could not attribute value to the homework.

Another factor, suggested by the data, which potentially contributed to exacerbating the students' negative perception of the homework, was that it was not corrected and returned in a timely manner; a responsibility assigned to the teacher. This seemed to minimize the role of the homework. Firstly, those students who pushed themselves to complete their assignments but did not get timely feedback questioned its value since they were unable to use the feedback in their projects. Also, for other students, the delayed feedback was the ideal excuse to take a break from project writing and disengage.

My plan of action to treat with the above, then, was to design a project that would not completely rely on students learning content at home on their own. This seemed to be too great of an expectation from this particular group of schoolchildren who generally seemed to lack the skills (i.e., knowledge transfer) and the level of individual autonomy required for this type of task — not to mention their negative disposition towards MFL (cf. 4.2.1). Moreover, I significantly decreased the amount of homework and only used it in a meaningful way to further exploit the perceived value of the project rather than diminish it. This I hoped would result in homework that better complemented the project and increase the project's overall authenticity thus encouraging greater engagement with it.

- Regular interruptions

Another aspect that emerged from my engagement with the data was the constant interruptions that this research cycle experienced, which ultimately seemed to have an impact on engagement because they interfered with the flow of the project (e.g., students forgetting what they had learnt, etc.). These interruptions refer specifically to

inspections from The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), internal inspections, religious observances, and other scheduled weekly activities.

It is worth mentioning that during visits from Ofsted representatives, project work was discontinued and Pamela reverted to a more traditional teaching-style, with which she felt more at ease, especially since her teaching was being assessed. These visits further disrupted project work, which, indirectly affected student engagement in negative ways, especially in terms of teacher-student relationships. To illustrate, during group interviews, students reported that they had asked for project work during the Ofsted visits, but Pamela refused because she had scheduled other activities; and this seemed to contribute to general disengagement.

To overcome this obstacle, I designed a shorter project for Cycle Two. Also, I prepared project-related work for those days in which lessons were cancelled to ensure that students would not completely disconnect from the project. Here the value of the meaningful homework I previously described became evident. Finally, I hoped that by designing a project that complemented Pamela's personal preferences, she would be encouraged to continue doing project work even during my absences.

- Problems with group sizes and group work

The last area for improvement that seemed to emerge from the data refers to the collaborative experience in the project. After the first project I realised that the groups were too big (i.e., five students) based on the fact that they would get easily distracted while working. Pamela and I agreed that a potential reason for this was the number of low-achievers in this particular Y9 group. Thus, in the following project the group size was reduced to three.

From the data I also became aware that assigning groups did not seem to be a good idea. It seemed that students had an issue with not being able to choose their group members.

The data suggested that group compositions impacted on students' motivation to work. In light of this, for the second project I arrived at a common solution. This took the form of a three-column list, determined by Pamela and me, in which students were free to choose their group members as long as each student of the group belonged to a different column. This strategy reduced the odds of having many low-achievers or rowdy students in the same group.

6.6 Action Research C1 Reflecting (II): Researcher Account

This data analysis is organised in three parts. In the first part, central to answering this study's research question, I examine the extent to which the implementation of the ProE model led to ASEC engagement in the language-learning project. I conduct two separate **deductive** thematic analyses of the data obtained in the action research cycle using the analytical framework presented in 3.2.3 (i.e., the dimensions and indicators of student engagement in learning activities). These are (a) the global analysis of ASEC engagement and (b) the temporal analysis of ASEC engagement.

In parts two and three I focus on the factors that facilitated and diminished engagement, i.e., the facilitators and inhibitors of student engagement. Thus, driven by (a) the research need to explore the context in which engagement occurs in order to better understand what fosters or diminishes student engagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004), and also (b) my personal need to explore the strengths and limitations of my newly designed model (cf. 4.3):

- I firstly carry out a deductive thematic analysis of the data directed by the four elements of the ProE model (i.e., meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness, and competence) in order to understand how they foster student engagement.
- Secondly, I perform an inductive analysis of the data in order to identify the context-specific factors that inhibited engagement.

6.6.1 C1 ASEC Engagement

This part of the analysis concentrates on studying the extent to which the implementation of my pedagogical model led to ASEC engagement in Cycle One. I will explore ASEC engagement at two different levels. At the first level, which I refer to as the *global analysis* of ASEC engagement, I analyse engagement as an integrated whole. This type of analysis coincides with the majority of studies on student engagement since it studies this construct holistically and in retrospection (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for a discussion). Therefore, it is expected from the global analysis that I would be able to ascertain the overall impact of the ProE model on ASEC engagement with the language-learning project. The second level of analysis, which I understand as the *temporal analysis* of ASEC engagement, responds to the methodological requests for better understanding of student engagement formulated by authors at the forefront of the field (e.g., Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Greene 2015; Turner et al., 2014). I therefore approach ASEC engagement across time, rather than retrospectively. This type of analysis should allow me to gain an understanding of the ebbs and flows of student engagement as the language project unfolded. The combination of both analyses should help provide a sharp picture of the impact that the ProE model had on student ASEC engagement with the project.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, given that this section mainly aims to obtain an overall impression of the potential of the ProE model for student engagement, this construct is studied at a classroom level rather than an individual level in both the global and temporal analyses. An analysis of individual students, although desirable for understanding changeable differences amongst students' engagement (see Bakker et al., 2014, for a discussion), is beyond the scope of this study. I feel that an analysis of individual cases would not allow me to deeply explore the contextual factors shaping ASEC engagement, which, in addition to being useful to gaining a contextual

understanding of student engagement, is one of the main contributions of this research to the field of student engagement (see Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for discussions).

6.6.1.1 C1 Global Analysis of ASEC Engagement

Below I provide a deductive thematic analysis guided by the analytical framework presented in 3.2.3. This means that the evidence of ASEC engagement is organised around four indicators:

a) Concentration on project work (academic engagement)
b) Prosocial behaviour (social engagement)
c) Happiness (emotional engagement)
d) Effort to develop the project (cognitive engagement)

For the global analysis, I draw on several data sources focusing especially on those sources that provide retrospective insights into student ASEC engagement. These refer to the post-project interviews with both the students and Pamela, and the post-project questionnaires. As the discussion on temporal analysis will show, data from the research journal and the reflection sheets (i.e., open-response questionnaires) have little application at this level of analysis. This is because those data collection instruments consider student ASEC engagement neither retrospectively nor holistically. Rather they provide specific accounts of student engagement at precise points in time.

Academic engagement

In terms of *academic engagement*, the analysis shows mixed results that gravitate towards the low achievement of this type of engagement during the entirety of the project. Thus, while some evidence suggests that the majority of students were concentrating during project work other data suggests the contrary. Beginning with the

evidence supporting concentration, the results of the following I-statement suggests that the majority of students (i.e., more than two thirds) regarded themselves as focused throughout the project:

Table 6.2: Questionnaire results regarding academic engagement (i.e., concentration)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
8. In this project I was focused on project work	0	4	14	1

Interestingly, this is somewhat contradicted by the same students during the interviews. Two out of four groups interviewed made reference to low levels of concentration during the project. The following is an Extract from one of the interviews:

Extract 6.1

T01 Nicolás: Anything else that you think didn't go well, could be improved? Whatever you tell me is all valid.
T02 David: **Teamwork sometimes. Sometimes you get distracted, like [unintelligible] distracted because we don't work most of the time, but I don't know.**
T03 Nicolás: How can I improve that, how can I make sure that everybody is on task?
T04 David: You could work in a separate room from other people and then we won't get distracted.
T05 Rachel: Not work in separate room but like…
T06 Nicolás: Smaller groups, perhaps? Bigger groups?
T07 Rachel: Yes, bigger groups.
T08 Nicolás: **Do you think that would be less distracting?**
T09 Rachel: **No because then we've got a lot more knowledge to do it.**
T10 Nicolás: What do you think?
T11 Kate: I don't know.
T12 Nicolás: Please, put forward your point?
T13 Kate: It just depends on the person, if they get easily distracted.

(API:02.05.2014 Rachel, David, Todd, and Kate)

The Extract above, when combined with Pamela's views, seems to further support the idea that academic engagement did not actually fully materialise during this project. When Pamela was asked about the general level of concentration of the students during the project she responded:

Extract 6.2

T01 **Pamela: I think their behaviour for learning is not good that I have noticed. They are very chatty, as a group chatty, some of them don't have much resilience, they get very [unintelligible] and they cannot keep their focus for very long.**
T02 Nicolás: How is that related to the project?
T03 Pamela: To write text, they need time, they need patience and they need to write a draft and improve the draft and take notes. Some of them they can't do it because they didn't want to or because... I don't know, there are different reasons, and they lose concentration very easily and they don't like to do the same again and again. They get bored really easily.

(PI:24.05.2014)

The findings from the qualitative data challenge what the majority of students reported in the questionnaire thereby calling into question the validity of the self-reported, quantitative data. This issue will be discussed at the conclusion of this analysis.

Social engagement

Focusing now on **social engagement**, analysis of the data reveals similar results to those of academic engagement — i.e., mixed results gravitating towards the negative. The teacher data suggests generally low accomplishment of social engagement during the project, whereas quantitative, student data suggests the opposite. From the Table below it can be interpreted that, generally, students behaved (or thought they did) according to social classroom and school norms. This is gathered from I-statements 9, 10, and 11 where students report listening to the teachers and also taking their work seriously, both at the individual and group levels. From I-statement 12, however, it seems that social engagement was not as complete as the other statements appear to indicate. This is particularly noteworthy given that more than two thirds of the students reported having been reprimanded several times at some point during the project, which would imply that overall social engagement was far from achieved.

Table 6.3: Questionnaire results regarding social engagement (i.e., prosocial behaviour)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
9. In this project I paid attention to my teachers	0	5	6	7
10. In this project I took my group roles seriously	0	4	10	5
11. In this project I worked well with my group mates	1	4	6	8
12. In this project I was told off by the teacher	3	10	6	0

Furthermore, it seems that Pamela disagrees to some extent with some of the affirmative statements recorded in the Table above. The following Extract, which belongs to the post-project interview data, suggests that overall the class did not demonstrate positive social conduct throughout the project; rather, they misbehaved:

Extract 6.3

T01 Nicolás: What else do you think didn't go so well? Is there anything else you would like to highlight?

T02 Pamela: **I don't think they can work in groups, it's just they don't know how to do it. They just mess around no end and, at least for me, they think it's okay to mess around for 10 minutes and then work the last 5**. No, sorry, it's not acceptable, whatever you say, you need to work.

(PI: 24.05.2014)

Emotional engagement

Similarly, as with the former types of engagement, the results for **emotional engagement** are also inconclusive. Nevertheless, the data suggests that most students did not achieve this type of engagement overall. This understanding is derived from the negative emotional experience reported on by more than half of the students.

Considering the theme of happiness with the project as evidenced in the self-reports, the Tables below show that students' reports slide more toward the negative rather than the

positive. For example, in I-statement 13, approximately two thirds of the students responded negatively when asked directly about happiness. This finding is supported by the results of I-statement 6, in which the same number of students report against the project's motivating capacity. Surprisingly, however, in I-statement 7 the contrary occurs; almost two thirds of the students report looking forward to project work. One possible way of interpreting this discrepancy is that although the majority of students generally did not feel happy during the project, they still preferred it to other type of work (i.e., individual work). Moreover, the remaining I-statements (i.e., 14, 15, 16) show that most students did not feel bored, anxious, or fed up with the project. In light of the previous results, this seems to suggest that these feelings do not necessarily correlate to student happiness. This is an interesting finding given that many scales that measure emotional engagement at the classroom level, as evidenced through feelings of happiness, generally include items looking at these aforementioned areas to some extent (e.g., Reeve & Lee, 2014; Skinner et al., 2009).

Table 6.4: Questionnaire results regarding emotional engagement I (i.e., happiness)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
13. When doing project work I was happy	2	9	4	4
14. When doing project work I was bored	2	13	4	0
15. When doing project work I was anxious	11	6	2	0
16. When doing project work I was fed up	5	8	6	0

Table 6.5: Questionnaire results regarding emotional engagement II (i.e., happiness)

	A lot	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
6. The project was motivating	2	6	9	2
7. I looked forward to project work	3	8	6	2

Comparing this to the teacher data, it seems that the assumption made above is not adequately supported. This data reveals that the majority of students were more happy than unhappy, which contradicts the questionnaire data. This is illustrated in the following Extract in which Pamela makes reference to motivation as being present throughout the project for most students, rather than the opposite:

Extract 6.4

T01 Pamela: We [they] were creative. They took the project, **they were motivated and they were willing to do it.** They did all their homework even though they found their homework boring sometimes, they did it, and they were willing to apply most of the things we gave them.

(PI:24.05.2014)

Although Pamela's divergent view on emotional engagement would give rise to a case of inconclusive evidence, as was the case for academic and social engagement, I believe that this discrepancy could be interpreted as a case of the teacher inaccurately estimating the students' feelings. This is of course, provided that the students reported truthful information. Thus, contrary to other dimensions of engagement such as academic, social or cognitive engagement that can be observed by the teacher, students are best fitted to report on their emotions (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Although teachers may decipher emotional engagement by observing facial expressions and body language, as discussed in 3.2.3, ultimately we cannot know what goes on inside our students' heads. Hence, their reporting would have more validity in this respect than ours.

Cognitive engagement

Finally, as far as **cognitive engagement** is concerned, analysis of the data indicates that the majority of students achieved this type of engagement in the project. This is evidenced by an agreement between the students' and the teachers' perspectives on effort made to develop the project. Considering the students' views, Table 6.6 below and specifically, I-statement 17, reveal that more than two thirds of the students felt that they made an effort to accomplish the project. In addition to this, I-statements 18 and 19 reinforce this view by suggesting that, on the whole, the students not only tried, but they tried the best they could. This is evidenced by two thirds of the students reporting willingly going beyond the minimal requirements and around the same number reporting not giving up in the face of difficulty.

Table 6.6: Questionnaire results regarding cognitive engagement (i.e., mental effort)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
17. In this project I tried to work at my best	0	5	10	4
18. In this project I did more than just the work assigned	5	7	7	0
19. In this project I gave up in the difficult parts	5	10	3	1

Considering the teacher data, Pamela's opinion of the project, in terms of cognitive engagement, is consistent with the results conveyed by the students' self-reports. Thus, there is evidence in the data confirming that students, on average, tried their best to develop the projects. This is illustrated in the Extract below:

Extract 6.5

T01 Nicolás: Do you think they tried at least?
T02 Pamela: **I think they did. Most of them they tried, but even people like John with low motivation, they try their best, also even Charlie who really struggled a lot, he tried his best**.

(PI:24.05.2014)

Concluding remarks

Concluding this section, we can say that, except for (a) emotional engagement, where most students reported not having enjoyed the project, and (b) cognitive engagement for which there is agreement on its achievement from the teacher and student data, that the results for other dimensions of engagement are ambiguous. Contradicting data for academic and social engagement makes it difficult to determine whether these types of engagement were achieved in the project. Overall, the present global analysis therefore seems unable to provide a clear and general picture of student ASEC engagement in the project largely due to discrepancies in the data.

That being said, inconsistency in the data can be explained in light of several possible factors. Firstly, it is possible that either the views of the students or the teacher's are not in line with reality. Research constantly underscores the inability of self-reports alone to provide an accurate picture of reality. This is because of a lack of honesty in responses, participant misunderstanding of the questions, participant lack of introspective ability to provide an accurate answer, participant differentiated interpretation of rating scales, participant response bias, or the inability of ordinal measures to provide detail, amongst others (see Austin et al., 1998; Balakrishnan 1999; Fan et al., 2006; Furnham 1986; Wilcox 2012, for discussions). Moreover, another body of research also shows that teachers' understanding of student engagement (and especially emotional engagement) can often diverge from reality (e.g., Cothran & Ennis, 2000; Harris 2011; Jonasson 2012; Ravet 2007; Zepke et al., 2014). For example, in a study conducted on perceptions of disengagement in school, Ravet (2007) found that students reported different causes

for their disengagement than the ones that teachers identified, including that their teachers did not perceive their feeling states. As the author concludes (Ravet 2007: 345):

> […] On the whole, pupils experience a range of feeling states that neither teachers nor parents perceive at all—i.e. they fall into a perception gap.

Secondly, divergent views on engagement could also be due to studying ASEC engagement in retrospection. This is an issue that is widely discussed in psychology research (e.g., Bakker et al., 2014; Bolger et al., 2003; Ohly et al., 2010). Studying engagement in hindsight in the case of long-term endeavours such as projects would have the associated risk of generating a version of the facts that does diverges from the reality. This is because the data may be largely determined by factors such as the current psychological state in which the participant is at the moment of providing it, and/or the capacity of the participant to accurately recall events that occurred in the distant past. This would apply in this case to both the students and Pamela.

In conclusion, from my argument above one might speculate that, contrary to what is believed in mainstream research, a global analysis of engagement alone may be insufficient to properly assess engagement, especially in long-term activities such as projects. As previously mentioned, this could be due to the following factors: exploring engagement holistically may not provide an accurate picture because of the distorting power of retrospection; and even when employing multiple sources of data collection this may not necessarily result in a clearer understanding. This would have implications for engagement research where most research not only studies engagement holistically, but also relies on self-reported data only (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Greene 2015, for discussions).

6.6.1.2 C1 Temporal Analysis of ASEC Engagement

In this section, I provide what I call the temporal (deductive thematic) analysis of ASEC engagement. This consists of a day-by-day description of student ASEC engagement

with the project, which I refer to as *Episodes* — and for which a descriptive title is provided for easy recollection.

For this analysis, I relied heavily on the research journal to reconstruct the events in terms of student ASEC engagement in the project. This is because after the data was collected engagement was conceived as a dynamic psychological process that changes over time, coupled with the fact that there was sufficient data available. This does not mean that the data obtained from other research instruments was not taken into consideration when appropriate. In fact, whenever possible, I substantiated journal data with that of other instruments such as post-project interviews with students or interviews with Pamela. However, it must be mentioned that only two of the five instruments employed in this research were fully able to provide information on student ASEC engagement while the project was still in progress: the research journal and the reflection sheets. The remaining three (i.e., post-project interviews with both the students and Pamela, and the post-project questionnaires), as already discussed, explored engagement once the project was over — i.e., retrospectively and holistically. For this reason, the research journal constitutes the empirical basis upon which this thematic analysis unfolds.

I am aware that a strong reliance on a research journal that was initially designed for a slightly different purpose (i.e., recording my own perceptions of student engagement in context) rather than systematically exploring each dimension of engagement on a day-by-day basis, may give rise to a number of gaps in the data (e.g., no recorded evidence of emotional engagement in a particular Episode). Nevertheless I consider this to be beneficial, as I feel that any description of student engagement over time, although incomplete (and inherently biased), can help provide a richer understanding of this phenomenon. This is mainly because such analysis could indicate the points in time in

which engagement was strengthened or diminished, and could also make it easier to identify the causes for this.

In light of the preceding, Table 6.7 lists the Episodes of the language-learning project conducted in this research cycle, including brief descriptions that give a clear picture of how the project developed.

Table 6.7: Description of the Episodes of the language-learning project C1

Episode	Title	Date	Description
Episode 1	Presentation	14.01.2014	This Episode consisted of the presentation of the structure, goals and objectives of the project. Students were shown a video of schoolchildren from a school in Mexico inviting our Year 9 group to write stories in Spanish.
Episode 2	The marshmallow challenge	17.01.2014	In this session, the students were placed in their new groups to complete a team building activity called The Marshmallow Challenge: a problem-solving activity in which teams need to build the tallest tower made of spaghetti and attach a marshmallow on the top without the tower falling off or breaking.
Episode 3	Working in groups	24.01.2014	In this session, the students worked for the first time as a group on a series of project-related activities.
Episode 4	Writing up	29.01.2014	This session mainly focused on having the students begin to write the stories in their groups.
Episode 5	Looking words up	07.02.2014	In this session, the students continued their writing after having received training on how to look up words in the dictionary and also on how to use a writing aid to help them in their writing.
Episode 6	Writing-up continues I	12.02.2014	The aim of this session was to have students continue writing their stories with the help of the writing aid and other resources
Episode 7	Writing-up continues II	14.02.2014	Students continued with the writing process in this session.
Episode 8	Writing up continues III	28.02.2014	The aim of this session was to have students work towards completing their stories.
Episode 9	Simplification	19.03.2014	During this session we did an exercise on simplification. The students found it difficult to translate their stories into Spanish due to the use of complex language in their original versions written in English. Thus, we found it necessary to adapt their writing to match their level of Spanish.
Episode 10	Substitute teacher	21.03.2014	This session entailed having students finish translate the sentences from Episode 8 into Spanish so that they could incorporate them into their stories
Episode 11	Poster making	30.04.2014	This was a session in which the students brought their stories to life by turning them into poster presentations.
Episode 12	End of the project	02.05.2014	In this session the students finished their poster presentations.

Table 6.8 below provides an overview of how engagement in its four dimensions unfolded across each one of the Episodes (note that the presence of a particular dimension of engagement is represented by the symbol "✓", its absence by the symbol

"×", and the absence of evidence and/or inconclusive evidence is signalled by a patterned area).

Evidence of particular dimensions of engagement (i.e., "✓") is determined by the agreement of all sources of data available for that particular Episode. For example, a claim for on-task behaviour (i.e., academic engagement) during a given Episode could be concluded from an agreement between student and teacher data — in which the majority of students argue that they stayed focused during the lesson and the teacher, on the other hand, corroborates that in his/her reflections. Contrastingly, inconclusive evidence of particular dimensions of engagement (i.e., patterned area) would be the result of inconsistencies in the data. Considering the previous example, the evidence would be deemed inconclusive if students argue that they displayed on-task behaviour but the teacher disagrees. Finally, the absence of data of particular dimensions of engagement (i.e., "×") is self-explanatory: no meaningful data is found in the data set.

Table 6.8: Results of the C1 temporal analysis of ASEC engagement

	Episode 1 Presentation **15.01.2014**	**Episode 2** Marshmallow challenge **17.01.2014**	**Episode 3** Working in groups **24.01.2014**	**Episode 4** Writing up begins **29.01.2014**	**INTERRUPTION X 1 WEEK**	**Episode 5** Looking words up **07.02.2014**	**Episode 6** Writing-up continues I **12.02.2014**	**Episode 7** Writing-up continues II **14.02.2014**	**HALF TERM HOLIDAY X 1 WEEK**	**Episode 8** Writing-up continues III **28.02.2014**	**INTERRUPTION X 2 WEEKS**	**Episode 9** Simplification **19.03.2014**	**Episode 10** Substitute teacher **21.03.2014**	**EASTER HOLIDAY X 3 WEEKS**	**Episode 11** Poster making **30.04.2014**	**Episode 12** End of the project **02.05.2014**
Academic engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	×	✓		×		✓	×		✓	✓
Social engagement	✓			✓		✓	×	✓				×	×		✓	✓
Emotional engagement	✓	✓	✓			✓				×		×				
Cognitive engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	×	✓				✓	×		✓	✓

Table 6.8 above suggests that a temporal analysis of ASEC engagement provides different results than when studied retrospectively and holistically. From this Table, we can draw several conclusions. The first is that engagement in long-lasting activities seems to fluctuate over time, as the global analysis also implied where conclusive evidence was available (i.e., cognitive engagement).

An overview of the contents of the Table suggests that student engagement was consistent from Episodes 1 through 5, followed by a drop in Episode 6, then a rise in Episode 7. Episodes 8, 9 and 10, show a decrease on the general levels of ASEC engagement, with an increase that remained constant for Episodes 11 and 12. It appears then that students seemed to be engaged during the first half and at the last stages of the project, on average, whereas, during part of the second half they appeared to be disengaged.

Overall, this demonstrates that student engagement may vary across days (if not minutes), and therefore engaged students are not necessarily constantly engaged throughout the duration of an activity or project in this case; and this may possibly be in response to personal and contextual factors. To illustrate a drop in general levels of engagement, consider the analysis of Episode 6:

- **Episode 6 – Writing-up continues 1 (12.02.2014)**

The aim of this session was to have students continue writing their stories with the help of a writing aid and other resources. On this occasion, the data indicates that the majority of students did not accomplish academic, social, and cognitive engagement. Regarding emotional engagement, insufficient data was found to ascertain whether this dimension of engagement was achieved. These results break the positive trend found in the previous Episodes.

Starting with *academic engagement*, there is some evidence in the data suggesting that overall, the students were not concentrating during the session. In the research journal I made the following observations about negative academic engagement based on lack of work done:

Extract 6.6

I think today has **not been a very good day. Two of the groups were not working to the best of their abilities**.

Extract 6.7

Actually **she [Pamela] has told me that they weren't doing anything to which I agreed**.

(RJ:12.02.2014)

Regarding *social engagement*, the data indirectly indicates that there was misbehaviour in the session, probably at the classroom level. In what follows, I refer to a general feeling of students not behaving, as they should:

Extract 6.8

Walt was very disruptive and didn't want to work. […] On the other hand **Bart didn't even bring out a pen and Claire was as usual: very lazy and demotivated**. […] I think that **all I can do is help Pamela to solve the problems of behaviour that we are facing right now.**

(RJ:12.02.2014)

Similarly, there is evidence to suggest the absence of *cognitive engagement* in this Episode. By way of example, it seems clear from the following extract that students did not try very hard to do project work:

Extract 6.9

Some of them don't even bring paper and pen to class. Others are not using the writing aid we gave them last week and they are asking for help when all they need to do is go to their notes. These are just few samples of the kind of the students we're dealing with. **The overall atmosphere is really bad**.

(RJ:12.02.2014)

The preceding results reinforce the view of an emerging body of research in education that student engagement should be studied across time in order to provide a

comprehensive and complete overview of such in learning activities (Bakker et al., 2014; Malloy et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014).

The second conclusion that can be drawn from Table 6.8 is that the dimensions of engagement are interconnected. In Episodes like Episodes 6 or 8, it can be observed that when engagement was not achieved, it was unachieved on several dimensions simultaneously. To illustrate this, consider the analysis for Episode 8:

- **Episode 8 – Writing up continues 3 (28.02.2014)**

The aim of this session was to have students work towards completing their stories. Analysis of the data suggests that engagement was not very successful at the academic, emotional and cognitive levels. No traces of social engagement were found in the data. Again, there is a drop in engagement after the positive recovery in Episode 7. This fall then continues for the next two Episodes, as the following illustrates.

Concerning *academic engagement*, evidence suggests that there was little concentration during this session overall. In the extract below, I express a bad impression of the overall on-task behaviour:

Extract 6.10

In terms of project work **today was not a success**.

Extract 6.11

However, this was for nothing because **none of the groups worked at their best**. Actually, the class backfired in every sense. Even with Pamela being around helping the groups. **One group only wrote 1 sentence in 2 hours.** That's appalling. […] That's a defeat on my side. […] But hey, it was not all that bad!

(RJ:28.02.2014)

The lack of academic engagement is also evident in the reflection sheets that the students completed during the session. There, when asked about what was not going

well with the project, one third of the students from different groups reported the following issues:

Extract 6.12

Everyone [not] doing their sentences (Rachel)
People getting distracted (Kate)
Staying on-task (Todd)
Messing around (Charlie)
People (Claire)
We talk too much about other stuff (Walt)
Concentrating (David)

(RS:28.02.2014)

Although these results are not representative of the majority, they seem to confirm what is reported in the research journal.

Regarding *emotional engagement*, a fairly positive level of happiness is observed in the reflection sheets, where only two students expressed their disappointment with the session. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the vast majority of students were neither positive nor negative when evaluating the session:

Table 6.9: Reflection results regarding emotional engagement (i.e., happiness)

	Not really	It's okay	A lot
This is how much I am enjoying the project so far	2	14	2

However, the contents of the Extract below help clarify that emotional engagement was in fact more negative than positive:

Extract 6.13

They have realised now that this project is too big for them and the reflections illustrate that. Like I said **we failed to sustain the motivation**.

Extract 6.14

Also, I think that the children were not very inspired to reflect because **they didn't have a great experience**.

(RJ:28.02.2014)

Moreover, the data also reveals direct evidence of *cognitive engagement* by a large number of students. The following comments are examples of students' recollection of what went well in the session. They seem to indicate that overall, they made an effort to advance their projects:

Extract 6.15

Working together (Sharon)
Translating words from English to Spanish (David)
Our story is sounding good (Rachel)
Writing the story (Bob)
Teamwork (Todd)
We are nearly finished (Sawyer)
We have finished writing in Spanish but we need to write it out in neat (Randolph)
The draft and the layout of the story (Tom)
We're getting the main structure of the story (Helen)
We need to do Spanish now (Hugo)
We finished the draft (Claire)
At this stage we are doing well when writing a good story, which makes sense (Desmond)
All of it is going well (Walt)

(RS:28.02.2014)

Surprisingly, this information significantly contrasts with the data from the research journal. As can be seen below, I report a lack of effort by students to undertake project work:

Extract 6.16

Well, I still think that it would pay off with a better group. Talking about that, **they have not checked the project handbook at all. This is really irritating**.

Extract 6.17

They **barely check their notes or handouts**. They are **just stuck and too lazy to look at their notes**.

Extract 6.18

The idea was to make them aware that they had to work hard to finish the tale because they were running out of time. However, this was for nothing because **none of the groups worked at their best**.

(RJ:28.02.2014)

Here we observe another example of a clash between teacher- and student-perspectives. This shows the complexity of understanding student (cognitive) engagement even when it is considered from different viewpoints. Moreover, these conflicting perspectives suggest that a third perspective may have helped clarify the issue. Another possibility is that the students were right and therefore, they were cognitively engaged in this Episode. In such a case, this would have implications for engagement research since emotional engagement is often regarded as a mediator of cognitive engagement (e.g., Lee 2013; Li & Lerner, 2012), and here this mediation did not occur.

In light of the above, the finding that the accomplishment of certain dimensions of engagement fosters others is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Harris 2011; Li & Lerner, 2012; Reeve 2013; Skinner et al., 2008). Although the results of these studies must be interpreted with caution, they are of particular interest for mainly two reasons. Firstly, interconnection amongst types of engagement suggests that behaviour, emotion or cognition, should not be neglected when fostering student engagement (cf. 3.2.3), since this could potentially harm overall engagement. Secondly, identified correlations can help shed light on gaps in the present temporal analysis, especially in the case of emotional engagement for which little evidence was found. In fact, studies have detected that behavioural and emotional engagement are closely interrelated. For example, in a study conducted at the activity level involving 805 American schoolchildren aged between nine and 14, Skinner et al., (2008) found an intimate, almost reciprocal relationship between behaviour and emotion. Although this relationship was more pronounced on the emotional side, i.e., students with higher emotional engagement showed higher behavioural engagement, there were indications that the opposite reciprocal effect did exist to some extent (i.e., behavioural disaffection led to negative emotions). Similar results have been found in more recent studies on student

engagement at the school level, e.g., Lee (2014), who explored U.S. data of the Program for International Student Assessment 2000 (3,268 fifteen-year-old students). The author concludes (Lee 2014: 182):

> The effect of emotional engagement on reading performance was partially mediated through behavioral engagement. In other words, students with higher levels of emotional engagement showed higher levels of behavioral engagement and this led to higher reading scores.

While it is clear from these studies that behavioural engagement is not a strong predictor of emotional engagement (e.g., a student could be just pretending to be concentrating on a task), since it only seems to affect emotions when behaviour is negative rather than positive, I believe that the latter weak association should not be completely overlooked. These findings imply that there is a possibility that emotional engagement could be partially mediated through behavioural engagement (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2012 found that behavioural and emotional school engagement were related bi-directionally). Thus, taking this into account, Table 6.10 has been modified to provide a more complete visual representation of engagement across time. Episodes 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 12 now show outcomes for emotional engagement. This engagement has been determined by considering both academic and social engagement in the Episode, as this is how I dissect behavioural engagement. It must be underscored that this is just an estimate and as such the reader should bear in mind that it can be misleading to some degree.

Table 6.10: Results of the C1 temporal analysis of ASEC engagement (with emotional engagement inferred)

	Episode 1 Presentation **15.01.2014**	**Episode 2** Marshmallow challenge **17.01.2014**	**Episode 3** Working in groups **24.01.2014**	**Episode 4** Writing up begins **29.01.2014**	**INTERRUPTION X 1 WEEK**	**Episode 5** Looking words up **07.02.2014**	**Episode 6** Writing-up continues I **12.02.2014**	**Episode 7** Writing-up continues II **14.02.2014**	**HALF TERM HOLIDAY X 1 WEEK**	**Episode 8** Writing-up continues III **28.02.2014**	**INTERRUPTION X 2 WEEKS**	**Episode 9** Simplification **19.03.2014**	**Episode 10** Substitute teacher **21.03.2014**	**EASTER HOLIDAY X 3 WEEKS**	**Episode 11** Poster making **30.04.2014**	**Episode 12** End of the project **02.05.2014**
Academic engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	×	✓		×		✓	×		✓	✓
Social engagement	✓			✓		✓	×	✓				×	×		✓	✓
Emotional engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	×	✓		×		×	×		✓	✓
Cognitive engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	×	✓				✓	×		✓	✓

As seen above, the gaps for both social engagement and cognitive engagement remain unaltered. In the case of social engagement this is because instances such as Episode 2 and 3 show that even though there was emotional engagement, student pro-social behaviour did not materialise. Therefore, we should not try to infer social engagement independent from emotional engagement. This may seem to run against the empirically validated assumption that emotion moves behaviour in activities. However, it is noteworthy that the studies cited above understand behavioural engagement mostly in terms of student attention to the work being done. In other words, their conceptualisations of behavioural engagement correspond more with my understanding of academic engagement. This would explain why in the aforementioned Episodes, students disengaged socially despite finding pleasure in the activities at hand; and hence my reason to leave this dimension of engagement in Episode 2, 3 and 8 'unchecked'. Moreover, the box corresponding to cognitive engagement remains unaltered on the basis that there is research at the activity level, supporting the notion that behavioural and/or emotional engagement does not lead to cognitive engagement (e.g., Harris 2011; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Although these works conceptualise cognitive engagement in a slightly different manner than this study does (i.e., in terms of cognitive strategy use), they demonstrate an understanding of the concept in terms of mental effort, thus making them relevant.

In addition the third conclusion that can be drawn from Table 6.10, which is of special interest to today's engagement research (see Greene 2015, for a discussion), is that it is possible for students to be cognitively engaged (i.e., make an effort to develop the activity), while not being happy about what they are doing. In Episode 9, for example, students were not happy with doing individual work and they seemed to manifest this through misbehaviour. However, they still accomplished the goals set for them in the session, complying with the teacher's requests. To illustrate, below is the analysis of Episode 9.

- **Episode 9 – Simplification (19.03.2014)**

During this session we did an exercise on simplification. Because the students had first written their stories in English, they had difficulty translating them into Spanish due to the complex language used in the English versions. Thus, Pamela and I saw it necessary to adapt their writing to match their level of Spanish. According to the data, engagement was positively fulfilled at the academic and cognitive levels. However, social and emotional engagement were negative.

Regarding *academic engagement*, there is indirect evidence to suggest that, with minor exceptions, concentration was present during the session overall. For example, in the Extract below I report that most students worked well in the session:

Extract 6.19

I have to say that **all of them except for** Charlie, Walt and John **worked and tried to complete the sentences regardless of their negativity**. The thing is that **I think they did what they could**.

(RJ:19.03.2014)

In contrast, *social engagement* did not seem to have the same positive result. Thus, although misbehaviour is not directly reported in the data, the following Extract suggests its presence:

Extract 6.20

The kids had today a negative attitude. They were really happy to see me though. Even Claire smiled at me and asked me where I had been all these days but clearly this only lasted a few minutes. **Then they went back to the negative attitude towards doing work**. Essentially, this is because Pamela was quite adamant with her decision of not doing group work today. The kids were expecting this obviously because they saw me in class.

(RJ:19.03.2014)

Similarly, the Extracts above directly indicate an absence of *emotional engagement***.** This is highlighted by comments such as "The kids had today a negative attitude" or "they tried to complete the sentences regardless of their negativity", which indicate a lack of happiness.

Finally, as far as *cognitive engagement* is concerned, the data suggests that, in general, students made an effort to complete the work, despite the reported lack of social and emotional engagement. Again, this would be another instance counteracting the argument that cognitive engagement in learning activities mediates emotional engagement:

Extract 6.21

I must say before I move on to the negatives that I have read the tales and the stories are very original. **They have, to my surprise, managed to embed the 4 cultural topics within the stories. I am really proud of them in this sense.** This was the most difficult part of the project. Regarding their writing… **Well, they have tried** and it is in fact their competence what has got in between.

(RJ:19.03.2014)

Returning to the discussion, the results of this Episode would cast doubt on earlier findings that show that the relationships between cognitive and emotional (school) engagement are reciprocal (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2012), and that mental effort mediates positive emotions in learning activities (e.g., Lee 2013).

In conclusion, the temporal analysis of engagement seems to indicate that ASEC engagement was achieved during the project on several occasions, rather than being either achieved or unachieved as the global analysis implied. This is especially so in the case of cognitive engagement, for which conclusive evidence was found. This supports the argument that global analyses of engagement can only provide an approximation to the reality, and therefore should be deemed insufficient in isolation. In the sections that follow, I look into the contextual factors that facilitated and diminished ASEC engagement during the project.

6.6.2 C1 Facilitators of Engagement

In providing a substantial response to this study's research question (i.e., the extent to which the ProE model can shape student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities), concurrent with recent call for actions (Christenson et

al., 2012), I believe that it is important to ascertain not only to what extent the ProE model achieved such outcomes, but also to explore how these were facilitated. Research studies have already demonstrated that facilitating each one of the elements of the ProE model (i.e., meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence) is bound to foster student ASEC engagement in learning activities (cf. 3.2.3). Additionally, they are also the elements that were explicitly deployed to foster engagement. The aim of this section therefore is to analyse the ways in which these elements unfolded across the language-learning project to result in the findings of the previous analyses (i.e., global and temporal analyses of ASEC engagement). This seems to be key to understanding how engagement outcomes were fostered in this particular context and how engagement changed when conditions were altered.

Thus, I will analyse the data obtained regarding the facilitators of engagement using the five research instruments employed in this study (cf. 4.4). As previously mentioned, the analysis of these facilitators is conducted at the classroom rather than individual level, for the reasons explained earlier (cf. 6.6.11). Furthermore, because the research instruments were initially designed to capture information about the facilitators holistically, I am unable to provide the desired, day-by-day account of the development of each facilitator over time — in contrast to the earlier temporal analysis of student ASEC engagement — appreciating the implied limitations to understanding this entails. To counter this potential shortcoming, I endeavour to provide the most accurate picture possible of how each facilitator operated over the span of the project by coordinating the five different sources of data employed.

Finally, taking into consideration the recommendations of Turner and her colleagues (Turner et al., 2014) on research on engagement that can better inform understanding, in each analysis, I describe the instructional strategies I used to enact the components of the ProE model — given that facilitators of engagement are supported through

instructional strategies (Belland et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014). This is because identifying such strategies may help us better understand what works (or does not work) and why, when it comes to facilitating meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness, and competence in educational contexts such as this. The strategies have been selected following the principles that (a) they are empirically validated strategies in classroom studies (see Belland et al., 2013; Hamre et al., 2013; Hattie & Yates, 2013; Roehrig et al., 2012), and (b) I deem them suitable for enacting meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness, and competence in a given learning activity (e.g., the strategy 'provision of training on working together productively' may be suitable for activities where the students struggle to work in groups effectively but may no longer be necessary in further activities once students have mastered this skill), in my particular research context.

Meaningfulness

As explained in 3.4, a meaningful learning activity is an activity that is deemed worthy of pursuit. This is because it has elements that make it appealing to the student whether in terms of interest or value. To make the project worth pursuing then I employed the following strategies:

1. Foster students' interest by (a) infusing a novel experience (Anderman et al., 2004): that of working with Mexican schoolchildren; and (b) choosing a topic for the project that would connect with their roles as (British) citizens (Belland et al., 2013), that of writing about their country and culture.
2. Promote attainment value by (a) (regularly) explaining to students the benefits of the project, both in terms of content knowledge and skill acquisition, for their current and future lives (Brophy 2008; Jang 2008); and (b) reflecting upon the attainment value of the project (Kolodner et al., 2003; Turns et al., 2010).

3. Encourage creative expression (Starko 2013) by giving the students free reign to craft both the story and the final poster in whatever way they thought most creative.

That being said, analysis of the data indicates that, on average, students' perceived the project to have meaning. This means that students developed an interest in or appreciation for the project and also saw its application beyond the project itself.

Starting with the post-project questionnaire, the data suggests that most students found the project of value. This claim is supported by the contents of Table 6.11 below, which illustrate that more than two thirds of the students reported that the project was interesting to them and that it was a great experience to work with real people:

Table 6.11: Questionnaire results regarding meaningfulness of the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
25. This project was interesting to me	2	12	3	2
26. It was great to work with real Spanish-speaking people in this project (Mexican schoolchildren)	5	9	4	1

This general view that the project was authentic is also expressed in the qualitative data. For example, the research journal provides evidence that suggests that the project was initially well received because of its meaningful nature:

Extract 6.22

Undoubtedly, the best day with this class so far, hurray! **Pamela and me have never seen the children so engaged and interested in a task as today. The whole presentation worked perfectly and the video was the perfect hook for the project.** Before the video they were not entirely convinced the Mexican children would be real. Now they have a real audience to work for and you can tell that has had an immediate impact on their attitude, as it was revealed by the many questions they asked about the project – which shows a great interest! They even asked me right away if they could answer back the Mexican children and record a video and connect with them via Skype…This was certainly the greatest beginning of all. Now I only need to keep the motivation afloat – phew… That's not going to be easy…

(RJ:14.02.2014)

Considering the reflection sheets, throughout their reflections, eight students expressed the relevance of the project to their future lives as both students and adults, both directly and indirectly. For example, in the following Extract it is mentioned that the project contributed to their becoming more disciplined, to be more skilled at working with others, to learn more about a foreign country, and general adult life:

Extract 6.23

It's really helpful due to the fact that you get to know your classmates more and learn about a new interesting country (Helen)
It's a lot of work and required team work (Steve)
It teaches discipline and could be alright (Randolph)
It's good because it will help us, I like working as a team and it is a little more interesting (Tom)
I think the project is good and it could help me when I am older (Daniel)
I think we worked well as a group and we will do well as a group (Bart)
Good and will help is in the future (Rachel)
It's good because we are learning about Mexico (Tom)
I think the project is good and we are working well together (Desmond)
I like this project because it is fun and you get to work with other people (Todd)
I like it because it gets us to work together (Tom)

(RS:24.01.2014;07.02.2014;28.02.2014)

Although the data is by no means representative of all students, the fact that such data emerged without being prompted (i.e., in the open question 'Comments on project work'), suggests that meaningfulness was successfully supported in this project overall.

Finally, in the post-project interviews there is further evidence supporting the perceived meaningfulness of the project. In the following Extract, some students report that they liked the topic mainly because they were partnered with a school in Mexico:

Extract 6.24

T01 Nicolás: Anything else that you liked? Can be anything, the story, the topic.
T02 Walt: **I like the topic, yes.**
T03 Nicolás: You like it. What do you like about it?
T04 Walt: **I like writing the story and that, making up our own story.**
[…]
T05 Nicolás: Do you agree with him?
T06 Bart: Yes.
T07 Nicolás: Anything else apart from the topic?
T08 Desmond: **It was good that we actually got to speak to the Mexican kids as well. We had to contact them and stuff.**

(API:02.05.2014 Walt, Sharon, Bart, Desmond, and Claire)

It is worth mentioning that such evidence should be interpreted cautiously. While the interview data shows that there was general agreement on the meaningful nature of the project, there was in fact room for improvement. The following Extract shows that some students suggested modifying the project so as to communicate with the Mexican schoolchildren synchronously and use technology to make their work more worthwhile.

Extract 6.25

T01 Daniel: Instead of a tale, we did like…
T02 Charlie: Facts.
T03 Daniel: **Yes a PowerPoint or something on it, on Coventry, instead of the tale, because the tale didn't really make sense.**
T04 Sawyer: It was too hard to put everything, all the topics in one story.
T05 Daniel: **It would have been better to do a PowerPoint on the environment, a PowerPoint on the famous people and that.**
T06 Sawyer: Yes, like a slide for each topic or something.
T07 Daniel: Yes.
[…]
T08 Daniel: **It would be nice to speak to them face-to-face, because they actually sent us a video and we didn't do anything for them.**
T09 Tom: **Yes, that would have been really… Skype them would be like…**
T10 Charlie: **Yes, Skype them.**
T11 Nicolás: Would you like to Skype with them?
T12 Charlie: Skype Translate.
T13 Daniel: Yes.
T14 Nicolás: Record a video for them?
T15 Daniel: No, Skype.
T16 Tom: No, Skype.
T17 Nicolás: Skype is kind of difficult because of the time difference.

(API:02.05.2014 Daniel, Tom, Charlie, Randolph and Sawyer)

Autonomy

In this study autonomy refers to having freedom from external control or influence (cf. 3.4). In the context of learning activities we can translate this into students having decision-making ability over aspects of the activity such as its design and/or implementation, as well as over their own learning process. Autonomy was supported in this project through the following instructional strategies:

1. Use of informational, non-controlling language with students during the project (Jang et al., 2010; Reeve & Halusic, 2009).
2. Allowing students to choose different aspects of the project (Katz & Assor, 2006).

3. Allowing students to direct their own learning by setting deadlines for them and allowing them to work towards those deadlines (Loyens et al., 2008; Rogat et al., 2014).
4. Welcoming students' opinions and ideas throughout the activity (Assor et al., 2005).

Overall, it can be argued that this particular facilitator of engagement was generally supported throughout the project. Thus, according to the evidence found, most students agreed that they experienced a sense of empowerment.

Beginning with student data, the Table below shows that the majority of students welcomed the opportunity to decide on aspects of the project for themselves, such as the type of stories they would write or simply the role they wanted to carry out in their groups:

Table 6.12: Questionnaire results regarding perceived autonomy in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
34. I liked having freedom to make choices and decisions about the story with my group	4	15	0	0
35. I liked having freedom to choose the role I wanted	6	12	0	1

Data from the post-project interviews support the notion that a sense of autonomy was fostered in the majority of students. The following Extract illustrates a positive reaction by some students to having responsibilities and the power to determine their stories:

Extract 6.26

T01 Nicolás: Anything else that you liked about the project?
T02 David: **We could choose what we wanted to do because everyone, teacher telling us what to do. If that makes sense.**
T03 Nicolás: It makes sense. When you choose, you mean in general whenever we gave you the opportunity to choose whatever you wanted to write about?
T04 David: Yes.

T05 Nicolás: What about roles and any other things that you were…
T06 Rachel: **Yes, it was good that we all had a role so we knew what to do, in our group.**
T07 Nicolás: Do you feel involved in this project? Do you feel as if you have capacity…
T08 Kate: **Everyone had a job to do in the group.**
T09 Nicolás: How did it go?
T10 Rachel: Yes, good.

(API:02.05.2014 Rachel, David, Todd, and Kate, 02.05.2014)

That being said, it is noteworthy that those students who disagreed with the majority did so in an enlightening way. For example, a few students implicitly criticised having too much autonomy in the project, which, in turn, may have given rise to confusion on some occasions, and, at times, possibly contributed to disengagement among this particular group of students:

Extract 6.27

T01 Rachel: **And if all of us had a set… if you gave us a story, but then we had to make it our own, so then we had an idea of [unintelligible] thinking of it, just from our own…**
T02 Nicolás: So you mean more giving you a story, so you have it as a reference?
T03 Rachel: **Not giving us a story but saying what things could be in it, for each thing, different things for the group to be in it so we could do that instead of thinking of things.**
T04 Nicolás: **Do you think that would be better, to give you more structure, not just say…**
T05 Rachel: **Yes, so this needs to be in there.**
T06 David: Not suggestions.
T07 Nicolás: Instead of giving you full freedom like we did?
T08 David: Yes work on it.
T09 Rachel: Thinking of it by yourself.

(API:02.05.2014 Post-project Interview with Rachel, David, Todd, and Kate)

This finding represents one of the issues that may arise when implementing my third strategy (i.e., letting students direct their own learning) with secondary school students because they might sometimes have difficulty regulating their own learning and setting goals for themselves (see Puntambekar & Kolodner, 2005, for a discussion from an educational perspective and Steinberg 2014, for a discussion from a neuroscience standpoint).

Contrastingly, a group of students reported having being somewhat incapable of making important decisions in the project. They attributed this to Pamela's control over them, as can be observed in the following Extract:

Extract 6.28

T01 Sharon: When you say freedom, I don't even know what you mean because we still… I don't really know.
T02 Walt: **Yes, I think that we should get more freedom. Miss shouldn't keep coming over every two seconds.**
T03 Sharon: Yes, I don't really know how to explain it.
T04 Desmond: To be able to get ideas from other groups, go round the class or something.
T05 Nicolás: You mean like being able to move around the class.
T06 Desmond: Yes.
T07 Walt: Yes, I think…
T08 Sharon: **Yes, I think she should just stop being so strict on us, because I think we should just get given more of an opportunity. I think she should trust us more, that's what I'm trying to say.**
[…]
T09 Walt: When we were doing the group work she was on top of you every minute.
T10 Sharon: Yes.
T11 Walt: **You couldn't do anything. You're on about freedom, we didn't really have any.**

(API:02.05.2014 Walt, Sharon, Bart, Desmond, and Claire)

This finding is particularly important for two reasons. First, the preceding illustrates the inability of self-reports to give a full account of the facts under investigation. Considering only the responses of Table 6.12 (only one student responded negatively) no one could guess that some students did not actually feel empowered. Second, the fact that students reported the use of controlling behaviours by Pamela raises the issue of the partial implementation of certain instructional strategies. In other words, although I implemented the strategies listed above Pamela did not always implement them. This is understandable given that teachers may likely resort to greater measures of control when dealing with difficult students. My use of non-controlling behaviours then likely clashed with Pamela's teaching style, which seemed to be one in which the teacher largely regulates the students' learning process. This is further discussed when considering the facilitator of belongingness (to the teacher).

Belongingness (to peers)

As discussed in Section 3.4, belongingness is considered a psychological and developmental need of adolescents to be connected to other human beings. In the case of learning activities, it can be summarised as primarily feeling connected to both peers and the teacher during the duration of such activities (and beyond). In this section, I report

on the findings corresponding to close relationships with peers, and in the following, I focus on teacher-student relationships. Thus, to promote a sense of connection amongst peers in this project (i.e., belongingness to peers) I tried to facilitate the following:

1. Provision of training on working together productively, before and during the project (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Tharp et al., 2000).
2. Provision of shared goals: writing a story collaboratively (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Tomasello et al., 2005).
3. Provision of social goals such as aiming to improve collaborative skills (social development goals) and having responsibilities within the group (social responsibility goals) (Rodkin et al., 2013).

The results emerging from the data analysis seem to indicate a general perceived feeling of belongingness by students. The data suggests that, with minor exceptions, most students felt connected to those with whom they worked.

For example, the Table below reveals that more than two thirds of the students reported having a positive group experience during the project. This suggests that, for the most part, students may have experienced a sense of belonging to their respective groups:

Table 6.13: Questionnaire results regarding perceived belongingness (to peers) in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
28. I enjoyed my experience working in a group	4	10	4	1

This data is supported by qualitative evidence from the students. For the majority of students their perception of belongingness is suggested by how much they liked doing

group work and also, in how much they disliked not doing it. The following Extract illustrates this:

Extract 6.29

T01 Nicolás: It's okay, if the group work didn't work, it didn't work out…
T02 Walt: **No, we worked better; we all work better in a group than we do by ourselves.**
T03 Sharon: **Yes, that's what I mean though, we wanted to work in a group and then for the last four weeks Miss didn't let us. One bad thing happens and then she just said that we couldn't keep working in our groups.**
T04 Nicolás: Now we go to the things that you didn't like.
T05 Sharon: **When we had to do the work but not in our group, we had to do it individually, I didn't like that. That was what I mean, she took – she wouldn't let us go into our groups, she made us do it by ourselves. I didn't like that.**

(API:02.05.2012 Walt, Sharon, Bart, Desmond, and Claire)

Although the data above suggests overall contentment with the possibility of doing group work (and thus indication of belongingness), as questionnaire data indicates, there were also instances in which some students did not seem to enjoy the group experience. According to the data, one of the reasons why this may have occurred is due to the group's composition. This is suggested in the post-project questionnaire by ten out of the nineteen students who reported disagreeing with the way the groups had been put together by the teachers (Table 6.14), and also in Extract 6.30, and Extract 6.31 below:

Extract 6.30

T01 Nicolás: **Is there anything that you think we could improve?**
T02 Sawyer: **Let us pick our groups.**

(API:02.05.2014 Daniel, Tom, Charlie, Randolph and Sawyer)

Extract 6.31

T01 Nicolás: **Do you like the way we did it, how we assembled the groups, or would you prefer to choose the people?**
T02 David: **Choose them ourselves**.

(API:02.05.2014 Rachel, David, Todd, and Kate, 02.05.2014)

Table 6.14: Questionnaire results regarding liking of group composition

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
30. I liked the way my teachers put the groups together	4	5	9	1

Belongingness (to the teacher)

As specified above, the other half of the construct of belongingness corresponds to the extent to which students feel connected to their teachers on both the personal and academic levels. In this study, this is a somewhat complex area of exploration because, as the reader already knows (cf. 4.2.2), there were two teachers in the classroom. One of them, myself, occupied a less principal role, for reasons that I discussed in 4.3 (i.e., being a researcher-teacher rather than a teacher-researcher) and in 4.2.2 (i.e., my transition from teacher to guide/assistant). The other, Pamela, acted and was perceived as the principal teacher at all times. As discussed in 4.4.2, this is logical if we consider that the students were fully aware that I was a sort of 'visiting teacher' only staying for that academic year; and that Pamela was a full member of the staff with full capacity to punish, or speak to parents, amongst other characteristics natural to the role of the school teacher. This does not mean that I did not have such rights. In fact, I exercised most of them over the academic year. However, the students knew that my role in the school was similar to that of the substitute teacher who comes only for a specific lesson, without staying long enough to be considered a full member of staff.

This role as teacher seems to have been significant in this study for different reasons. Firstly, Pamela was not always at liberty to focus on all the strategies for providing high-quality teacher-student relationships (in particular, strategies one and two below). As previously suggested, this might have been due to her personal views on teaching and learning. Moreover, as I discuss in the following analysis (concerning inhibitors of

engagement), it was sometimes difficult to provide training for Pamela due to her demanding schedule. This could give rise to misinterpretation of the data, especially the questionnaire data, which makes no distinction between one teacher and the other. Secondly, for ethical (and moral) reasons I did not wish to probe students' comparative opinions of the support and care given by Pamela and by me respectively. Nevertheless, the reader will soon learn from the data that, with little exception, students did not seem to connect to Pamela on an emotional level. This will be borne out by a) the fact that they did not speak particularly highly of their relationship with her during the project, and b) the fact that they disclosed that information to me, which arguably forged a closer relationship between us. However, it is still reasonable to believe that the students withheld their opinions about me especially in the post-project interviews.

Moreover, it is also important to exercise caution when interpreting the students' comments about Pamela. It may be that their criticism towards Pamela comes from, for example, their desire to follow the status quo or their pre-existing habit to criticise authority. These would be typical adolescent behaviours (Steinberg 2014), and for that reason I believe it would be helpful to examine the student data with a slightly critical eye.

The instructional strategies deployed in the project to make students feel more connected to the teacher(s) included:

1. Developing caring relationships between the teacher and the students (Noddings 1988; Wentzel 1997).
2. Holding positive attitudes and enthusiasm during the project (Turner et al., 2002).
3. Treating students equally without favouritism or discrimination (Peter & Dalbert, 2010).

Considering the questionnaire data, it seems that, on average, the students seemed happy with their relationships with the teachers during the project. This is evidenced in the following Table with around two thirds of the students answering positively to the following statements:

Table 6.15: Questionnaire results regarding teacher-student relationships

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
23. My teachers have cared about my personal learning throughout the project	5	13	1	0
24. My teachers have had a positive attitude throughout the project	2	10	6	1

Surprisingly, the students in the post-project interviews do not seem to support this finding, where more than half the students described their emotional relationship with Pamela negatively:

Extract 6.32

T01 John: **Sometimes Miss. Pamela would be in a mood and she'd just start being sad.**
T02 Nicolás: **Okay. We can talk about Miss. Pamela if you want. Do you think that her mood influenced the way you worked?**
T03 John: **Yes.**
T04 Hugo: **Yes.**
T05 John: If someone is having a go at you, shouting at you and saying, "Do the work"…
T06 Hugo: You just get annoyed. You don't want to do it.
T07 John: You're like, "Yes, I'll do it…"
T08 Hugo: **Say if everyone is talking and she has a go at you and you're the one talking about work, it is annoying and then you just don't want to do anything.**
T09 John: **She shouts at you and then says, "Do the work". Someone has just shouted at you, "Well yes okay, I'll do anything for you".**
T10 Nicolás: Okay. Do you think she could have been more…?
T11 John: She's been alright this lesson. She wasn't in a mood this morning. It's when we have a lesson last period, all the lessons add up and she gets proper stressed out. Then we get the worst part of it.
T12 Nicolás: Oh right. I mean I'm really interested in what happened during the project. Was she okay during the project? Was she positive? Was she negative?
T13 John: **She didn't look like she wanted to do it.**
T14 Hugo: **Yes, she looked more like she wanted to do different stuff. She looked bored.**
T15 Nicolás: Oh right.
T16 Hugo: **Half the time she was moody and sometimes…**
T17 John: **When we'd say, "Oh yes, are we doing the project?" she'd be like go off the subject and bring in something else so we didn't do it or something.**

(API:02.05.2014 John, and Hugo)

In addition to this qualitative evidence, my own reflections align with what the students reported in the post-project interviews. In the research journal there is ample evidence that confirms a strained relationship between Pamela and the students over the duration of the project.

Moreover, there is indirect evidence in the data that indicates Pamela's awareness of the strained teacher-student relationship (see Extract 6.33 below). This is an important finding because, taken together with the qualitative data already presented, it could lend strong support to the argument that the questionnaire data did not show the reality of the events:

Extract 6.33

Pamela today needed to talk to someone. It is a pity that I couldn't record that because she opened up to me and told me that she is losing her passion for teaching**. She thinks that she has become very mean to the children because she doesn't understand them**. She mentioned that they belong to a different generation and the methods that would work with us, for example, don't work with them. I think that overall she thinks that she can't connect with the children's needs.

(RJ:28.02.2014)

Interestingly, further data suggests that the situation was not as bad as it seemed. Thus, belongingness to the teacher seemed to be supported at times. Evidence such as the following shows an example of a session in which Pamela had a completely different attitude towards the project and the students:

Extract 6.34

Today it was amazing to **see her in a completely different mood just because the students were learning**. Also, Pamela put Walt on the spot a few times, and that's something that you can do when the "other 2" are not around.

(RJ:28.03.2014)

Although such a change in her behaviour seemed to be shaped by the absence of two troublesome students, it also seems to suggest that student engagement may have contributed to her positive disposition. Should that be the case, these would be an example of a reciprocal relationship between student engagement and teacher support.

This is an issue that is getting a lot of attention recently in engagement research (see Currie 2014, for a discussion).

Competence

Competence as a facilitator is understood in this study as the students' perceived ability to do the learning activity successfully (cf. 3.4). In order to perceive the students' competence during the project, I implemented the following instructional strategies:

1. Provision of sufficient preparation for the project in terms of content, knowledge and skills (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).
2. Provision of specific, proximal, and attainable goals (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).
3. Allowing students to self-monitor and evaluate their learning progress several times throughout the project (Wood & Bandura, 1989).
4. Promotion of mastery orientations by making the project criterion-referenced (Fast et al., 2010).
5. Provision of process goal feedback (i.e., feedback that informs individuals about how to attain their goals) (Schunk & Swartz, 1993) and feedback related to attributes (i.e., attributing success to effort, persistence, and correct strategy use rather than intelligence or ability) (Dresel & Haugwitz, 2008) both verbally and in written format throughout the project.

Data from a variety of sources indicate that most students felt that the project was beyond their abilities or level of competence, i.e., difficult. This indicates that the facilitator of competence was not successfully supported throughout the project. The questionnaire data below illustrates this:

Table 6.16: Questionnaire results regarding perceived competence in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
27. I found this project easy	1	2	13	3

This message is also supported by the data from the post-project interviews with the students. In the interviews three out of four groups concurred that the project was beyond their capabilities. To illustrate, in the Extract below it can be observed that most of the members of a particular group did not have enough linguistic knowledge to effectively write in the target language:

Extract 6.35

T01 Nicolás: Right. How about the group, did you like the groups?
T02 Hugo: Not really, there was only three on it.
T03 John: It would be better if we got to choose them ourselves.
T04 Hugo: **Yes, because there was only really Steve who knew how to do it. Everyone else didn't really have a clue what they were doing. It was easy doing it in English but hard doing it in Spanish.**
T05 Nicolás: **Okay. Did you find this project difficult then?**
T06 Hugo: **Yes.**
T07 Nicolás: **What was the most difficult part do you think?**
T08 John: **Translating it into Spanish.**
T09 Nicolás: **Why do you think that was difficult?**
T10 John: **It wasn't difficult it just took ages because you had to look through the dictionary.**
T11 Hugo: **For literally every word.**
T12 John: **Every single word.**
T13 Hugo: Then when you got it back it had loads of spelling mistakes.

(API:02.05.2014 John, and Hugo)

The preceding is also in accordance with Pamela's opinion of the project regarding competence. In the Extract that follows, she explains that the project was too difficult for the students and this could have led to potential disengagement:

Extract 6.36

T01 Pamela: […] **They created the stories, they were working in groups okay, but it's just when they had to write they couldn't do it. From English to Spanish they couldn't do it. They're a very chatty group and working in groups is very difficult, they mess around a lot.**
[…]
T02 Nicolás: **All right. You said that they couldn't do it, what do you mean by that, can you expand on that?**

T03 Pamela: **Yes. They try to pass the English sentences into Spanish, they could not apply the rules they knew. They couldn't think, they thought they couldn't do it. Up to Year 9, when they've written they've written using instructions they've been given in Spanish. They were applying the rules but coming from Spanish, so having that idea in English and saying, "Now I need to write it in Spanish," they don't know how to simplify, how to say things in an easy way, in a way that they could say in Spanish. It's just too complicated for them. Even though we gave them a writing aid to help them, but still it was just too difficult, and the tenses, the rules with the endings it's just...**

T04 Nicolás: The thing is we didn't plan the project in that way, right? When we started the project, it was meant to be a translation exercise, right?

T05 Pamela: Yes, but they cannot think in Spanish. They have to create in their own language, English in this case, and then they wrote the foreign language. They are too immature, there's no way.

T06 Nicolás: You think it was too difficult for them?

T07 Pamela: Yes, it was. I remember when I was their age and I was in school, I couldn't write in a foreign language, I didn't have the tools.

(PI:24.05.2014)

Overall, the data presented above suggests that the students perceived the project as being beyond their academic level. Although the reason seems unclear, the data appears to indicate that I failed to gauge the students' readiness correctly, and thus I poorly implemented part of strategy number two above (i.e., setting attainable goals). In fact, as will be discussed in the following section (i.e., inhibitors of engagement), this seemed to be the main issue. Another possible reason could be the somewhat empowering nature of the project, in which students pursued a long-term goal (i.e., writing up the tale) over a period of time. Their inability to manage the project efficiently may have made students feel low in competence. Should this be the case that would mean that another part of strategy number two (i.e., setting proximal goals) was not accurately implemented. This is also discussed in the section devoted to the inhibitors of engagement.

Moreover, although the data above suggests that the facilitator of competence was not supported in the project overall, other evidence seems to indicate that while not being supported during the whole project, a perceived sense of competence was actually supported at certain points. For example, in the second open-ended questionnaires completed by the students, which took place in Episode 5, only two out of sixteen students expressed concern regarding perceived competence when asked about the problems they were currently having in the project:

Extract 6.37

Nothing (Sharon)
Teamwork (David)
Everyone cooperating (Rachel)
Nothing (John)
Working together in a group (Kate)
Co-operating (Todd)
I left my book at home that I had all the plans in (Sawyer)
Our resource manager forgets to bring our things (Randolph)
Sawyer forget to bring his book with the info in it (Tom)
The communication with groups and co-operation (Daniel)
Others concentration (Steve)
Future + past tenses (Hugo)
Nothing (Bart)
Tenses (Claire)
We need to try and write a good story to get a good end level (Desmond)

(RS:07.02.2014)

This suggests, though somewhat superficially, that the majority of students did not perceive a lack of competence on the day that this reflection was conducted. To reinforce this argument, the research journal registers fluctuations across time in the students' overall perception of their competence. The following Extract illustrates how Pamela and I tackled the perceived lack of competence and maintained the project's thrust.

Extract 6.38

Moving on to how the class unfolded, I have to say that it was the right thing to spend some time teaching them how to use a dictionary and how to adapt a text from English into Spanish. Also it was a good idea to spend some time correcting the homework in class. **This has given them the skills they need in order to be able to start writing. Obviously, the writing aid has been a total success. I can tell that the students are happier now that they can put sentences together. They have showed me that in their reflections.**

(RJ:07.02.2014)

Generally, the data above suggests that students, in fact, felt competent on certain occasions during the project. This finding would further support my argument that student engagement needs analysis across time for a full understanding of this phenomenon (cf. 6.6.1.2).

Concluding remarks

In this section, I have attempted to describe the ways in which the elements of the ProE model developed across the project to facilitate student engagement. From this analysis it can be interpreted that, globally the majority of students: (a) found the project to be worth pursuing (i.e., meaningfulness), (b) felt empowered throughout the project (i.e., autonomy), and (c) felt connected to the groups they worked in (i.e., belongingness to peers). On the other hand, the analysis also reveals that most students: (a) felt that they did not frequently have the necessary knowledge and skills to face the project successfully (i.e., competence), and also (b) felt that the teacher did not have a positive relationship with them (i.e., belongingness to the teacher) **(**Figure 6.1).

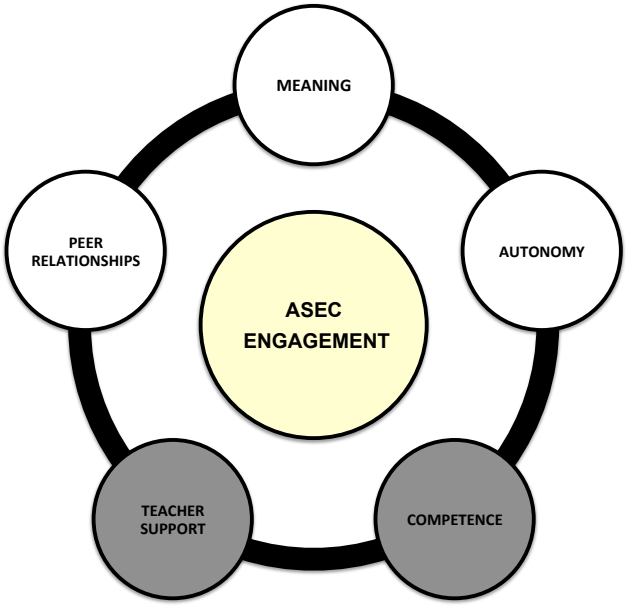

Figure 6.1: Elements of the ProE model not supported in Cycle One (greyed out)

Therefore it can be concluded that, at the classroom level, the facilitators of engagement: meaningfulness, autonomy, and belongingness to peers were supported throughout this project, while competence and belongingness to the teacher were not. However, these results must be interpreted with the utmost caution because, as we have also observed in this analysis, the facilitators of competence and belongingness to the teacher actually

materialised at different times in the project. This suggests that studying the development of the facilitators of engagement from a holistic perspective in activities that last longer than a class period may in fact lead to inaccurate results, hence the need for a temporal analysis. Since this issue was previously discussed at length (cf. 6.6.1.2), I will only re-emphasize the importance of this finding for engagement research.

Based on the foregoing then, a more sensible and realistic conclusion of the analysis for this section would be that all elements of my pedagogical model were supported across this project although competence and belongingness to the teacher were less frequent, and this negatively impacted on overall student engagement.

6.6.3 C1 Inhibitors of Engagement

After analysing the ways in which the aforementioned facilitators contributed to the results presented in both the global and the temporal analyses of ASEC engagement (cf. 6.6.1.1 and 6.6.1.2), in this section I address the context-specific factors that the data shows might have interfered with student engagement and by extension the implementation of the ProE model. Similar to the previous analysis of the facilitators of engagement, this thematic analysis explores the inhibitors retrospectively and at the classroom level; however, it does so inductively rather than deductively. The analysis is also based on the five research instruments employed in this study (cf. 4.4).

I feel that an analysis of the inhibitors of engagement is essential to gaining insight into the functioning of the ProE model, especially when it comes to understanding drops in student engagement. As experts argue (e.g., Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004; Perry et al., 2006; Turner & Patrick, 2008), student engagement can only be understood in full when we consider the context in which it is generated. Further, as Fredricks (Fredricks 2014: 39) notes, “engagement represents an interaction between individual characteristics and contextual factors”.

Additionally, a study of the inhibitors of engagement may considerably help towards identifying the strengths and weaknesses of my newly designed model especially concerning how it responds to the specific circumstances of my particular MFL context. Thus, in the following analysis I present those factors that hindered student engagement with the project. These are grouped under the themes of (a) pedagogical knowledge, (b) difficult students, (c) interruptions, (d) double periods, and (e) teacher stress.

Pedagogical knowledge

The notion of pedagogical knowledge can be summarised as knowledge about the method and practice of teaching and learning that is learnt through formal education and personal experiences (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Shulman 1986). This is knowledge, that, when combined with content knowledge — that is, knowledge about the subject matter (i.e., Spanish in this case) — makes the subject matter accessible to the students.

The data suggests that due to limited pedagogical knowledge in some instances I was unable to fully exploit the affordances provided by a project-based learning approach. As a result, this would have had a negative impact on student engagement, and ultimately their learning. Instances of shallow pedagogical knowledge seem to be particularly reflected in the data by (a) the students' struggling with a 'learning by doing' approach to learning, (b) the design of a difficult and complex project, (c) an inaccurate estimation of students' collaboration skills and learning strategies, (d) and the ineffective design of homework. I elaborate on these below.

a) Students' struggle with a 'learning by doing' approach to learning

To begin, content knowledge was facilitated in the project by a 'learning by doing' approach. In this particular context, this means that, in trying to meet the project's linguistic objectives, (e.g., the mastery of the past tense, etc.), students would have to learn and understand such linguistic elements with minimal guidance from the teachers

in order to be able to write their stories. Thus, in trying to write in the target language students would come across and benefit from new areas of learning (e.g., new vocabulary or grammar), which would be taught by the teachers when necessary. That being said, in order not to leave such an undertaking entirely up to the students, they were encouraged to review the necessary grammar and the vocabulary by completing specific homework assignments, which, once corrected, would serve as an aid to writing their stories. It is worth noting that students had already learnt most of the grammar and vocabulary in previous years, and also reviewed most of it during the preceding school term (cf. 5.2). Thus, the content knowledge that the project intended to promote was not completely alien to them.

Nevertheless, the data reveals that I failed to properly gauge the students' readiness to exploit the affordances given by a 'learning by doing' approach, and this negatively impacted on student-engagement. In fact, it seems that this project represented a significant change in the way students were used to learning (i.e., moving abruptly from a controlled setting to a self-guided one) and that diminished overall engagement.

Although these are the views of only a few students, these results are of merit because project structure was not a topic addressed in the interviews and therefore unexpected. Regardless, in the research journal there is further evidence lending support to the interpretation that the decision to rely on students to organise themselves during the class sessions to advance the project was not particularly well informed. This idea is synthesised in the following Extract:

Extract 6.39

On another note, I have realised that the homework is not going on par with the learning. **This learning by doing approach I have taken is failing in that the learners are not prepared to face the project.** They should have done all the homework beforehand.

(RJ:28.02.2014)

In light of the above, here too it seems possible that setting a long-term goal for the students (i.e., writing a story), and then expecting the students to (almost) guide themselves during the sessions until the goal was met, may have diminished some students' perceived levels of competence. This is turn may have been diminished these students' engagement of at some points during the project. This concurs with findings from goal setting research where it has been found that long-term goals (in learning activities) generally dampen engagement because it makes it difficult for students to judge the progress they are making towards the goals, thereby negatively affecting their perceived levels of competence (Anderman & Wolters, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002; Schunk 1989; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2006).

b) The design of a difficult and complex project

Similar to the first inhibitor is the issue of the project's design; my initial expectations were with simply too high. As also discussed when addressing the students' perceived level of competence, the project was deemed difficult at times. In this respect, further data shows that the difficulty of the project may have been due to a design that did not correspond with the students' academic maturity, which in turn may have affected engagement negatively.

Moreover, the data shows certain agreement by both teachers and students that the project was too complex, consisting of too many parts, which may have reduced engagement. To illustrate, in the post-project interviews two out of four groups of students brought up the complexity of the project. In the following Extract, for example we see students discussing the difficulty of trying to cover four topics simultaneously (i.e., environmental issues, geography of the UK, life and work conditions, and famous people):

Extract 6.40

T01 Sawyer: **It was too hard to put everything, all the topics in one story.**
T02 Daniel: It would have been better to do a PowerPoint on the environment, a PowerPoint on the famous people and that.
[…]
T03 Randolph: **Theirs [the Mexican schoolchildren] was about 100 words. We had to do 500 words, so 100 words each. Theirs was only about one topic, like we read one about food. We had to do one about all our culture, famous people, food and weather and stuff.**
T04 Daniel: Ours was a bit like all in one and then it was really rushed to get it finished.
T05 Nicolás: It was too big then?
T06 Daniel: Yes.
T07 Charlie: A bit jumbled up as well.
T08 Sawyer: Yes.

(API:02.05.2014 Daniel, Tom, Charlie, Randolph and Sawyer)

Overall, the aforementioned issues of difficulty and complexity of the project also corroborate previous findings from goal setting research that supports the idea that learning activities that are excessively challenging for students diminish student-engagement (Anderman & Wolters, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002; Schunk 1989).

It is worth noting that the data reveals that the difficulty and complexity of the project not only impeded engagement but also ultimately affected overall learning. For example, the questionnaire data shows that two-thirds of the class reported having actually learnt Spanish in this project (Table 6.17), implying that one-third perceived they had learnt little:

Table 6.17: Questionnaire results regarding learning in the project

	A lot	Some	A little	Not at all
1. This is how much Spanish I have learnt in this project	4	8	6	0

In fact, data from other sources suggest that the majority of students had not learnt much Spanish during this project (thus calling into question the students' perceptions in their self-report). For example, after the project, Pamela reflected as follows:

Extract 6.41

T01 Pamela: I really think they all tried at one point. The shame is not all trying at the same time. […]
T02 Nicolás: How do we label this, success for failure?
T03 Pamela: Again, it's both. For me I feel it was more of a failure because we don't have an end product because **I don't feel they learnt as much, it's my feeling I'm talking now, as much as I wanted them to learn**.

(PI:24.05.2014)

Similarly, in the last journal entry of the project I concluded the following:

Extract 6.42

Moving on now to the good things, I can see that the kids have been very creative. They finally made good-looking posters and I am glad for them. **Spanish wise they did not learn much of it**. Sighs… I really hope that the second project works better in this sense and they actually learn some Spanish. But well, that's the aim right?

(RJ:02.05.2014)

From this it is possible to speculate that low perception of learning amongst some students may in turn have affected engagement progressively across the Episodes of the project. This is something that has been previously documented in engagement research (see Fredricks 2014, for a discussion). Accordingly, past successes (or failures in this case) strongly influence subsequent motivation to engage in schoolwork.

c) Inaccurate estimation of students' collaborative skills and learning strategies

Another factor that seemed to negatively affect student engagement is the fact that students could not function well in groups. Generally speaking, the data shows that the inaccurate estimation of students' academic maturity regarding group work contributed to ineffective group work (e.g., students gossiping, not mixing well, or not having the necessary skills to perform the task at hand), which, in turn, may have negatively impacted on engagement and learning. Interestingly, this is a finding that somewhat contradicts previous statements about the students' positive experiences when working in groups. In this regard, it is possible that students' reported satisfaction with group work could be potentially related, not so much to an effective collaborative experience,

but to the freedom (i.e., autonomy) and connection to peers (i.e., belongingness) that group work entails, which are two of their developmental and psychological needs. If this were the case, this would imply that feelings of belonging could be achieved during group work even when this is not effective (see Juvonen et al., 2012, for a discussion).

Thus, considering the students' opinions regarding collaboration issues, approximately half of the students reported problems working with their teams at one point or another. The following Extract shows the answers given to the questionnaire item 'what did not go so well in the project':

Extract 6.43

Teamwork (David)
Everyone cooperating (Rachel)
Everyone working together in a group (Kate)
Teamwork and writing the story (Todd)
Others concentration (Steve)
Communicating (Claire)
Messing around (Charlie)
Work (Bart.)
We talk too much about other stuff (Walt)

(RS:07.02.2014; 28.02.2014)

Although one can argue that teamwork issues are a natural part of the process of collaborating, especially at initial stages when the group is beginning to come together (Johnson & Johnson, 1975), the fact that these issues are reported half way through the project and towards the end by some students seems to indicate that either some groups got stuck in the phase in between group formation and performance (see Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, for a discussion) or that effective group work simply did not occur during the project. Although this data is not representative of the majority, data from the teachers reveals that in fact, the latter (i.e., ineffective group work) appeared to be the reality overall. For example, Pamela, when discussing the effectiveness of group work in the project, reported collaboration issues at the classroom level in the form of a general lack of concentration while working in groups:

Extract 6.44

T01 Pamela: **I don't think they can work in groups, it's just they don't know how to do it. They just mess around no end and, at least for me, they think it's okay to mess around for 10 minutes and then work the last 5. No, sorry, it's not acceptable, whatever you say, you need to work.**
T02 Nicolás: Why do you think they didn't work in groups?
T03 Pamela: I don't know, because they asked for group work. I don't know, maybe sometimes our instructions were not clear or they didn't understand our expectations, and sometimes it's because that's how they work.
T04 Nicolás: What would you propose instead?
T05 Pamela: I have no idea, I really don't know.

(PI:24.05.2014)

The data from the research journal provides further evidence in this regard. For example, when reflecting on the overall project experience I point out that a new approach to group work needs to be taken if we wanted the students to make the most of the experience:

Extract 6.45

Essentially, we have come up with some ideas for the next group, most of them proposed by Pamela! **One of them is to reduce the number of members in each group to 3 people; and rather than working in groups from the beginning, we should scaffold the process:** first you work on your own, then in pairs, and then in a group.

(RJ:28.02.2014)

Regarding the issue of skills, the data also shows that an inaccurate estimation of students' learning strategies stood in the way of engagement (see Lee & Shute, 2010, for a synthesis of such strategies). Evidence shows that the majority of students struggled with applying previously learnt knowledge to the project and that they also lacked basic learning skills such as looking up words in the dictionary.

In general, the data suggests that, students were unable to see their homework as essential to writing their stories, and that seemed to indirectly dampen general engagement. For example, in the research journal I wrote:

Extract 6.46

They can't see that the homework they do is related to the project. **They don't see the connection and this was one of my aims because I wanted to make the homework relevant**. […] We have told them many

times how the homework is related to the project but this is not enough. I think we are going to be more persistent with this in Project 2 so that they establish the connection I seek.

(RJ:28.02.2014)

Pamela also shared this view in the post-project interview by reporting that most students did not use the knowledge gained through the homework to advance their stories:

Extract 6.47

T01 Pamela: No, they're learning, when they did the homework, for example, about the tenses. **According to the homework most of them understood, but when they had to put it into practice it's obviously not there**. I'm not sure, because they couldn't produce a sentence.

(PI:24.05.2014)

Interestingly, student data revealed a completely different reality in this regard. In the following Table, we observe that less than one third of the students reported not making use of materials including the homework. This finding casts doubt on the veracity that this data yields since both Pamela and I perceived the students' inability to transfer knowledge.

Table 6.18: Questionnaire results regarding use of materials for learning

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
20. In this project I checked my materials (homework and handouts) to help me with the writing	2	3	9	5

Further evidence indicates that, to Pamela and my surprise, students did not know how to look up words in a dictionary, which may have had an adverse effect on engagement. In the following Extract I express that:

Extract 6.48

Rachel was trying to do the task. She simply did not know how to look up a word in a dictionary. Actually, that is something that Pamela and I realised. They cannot start writing until they learn to be more autonomous with their writing. **Only a few of them are capable of doing so. In the next lesson we will teach them how to look words up and we will do some translation.**

(RJ:29.01.2014)

d) Ineffective design of homework.

Regarding the issue of homework, there is substantial evidence from different sources suggesting that, with little exception, the homework was not appealing to the students, with seemingly detrimental consequences for engagement and learning. Most students perceived homework to be generally difficult, overwhelming, unhelpful, and boring, and this may have had negative repercussions when it came to doing the homework and/or applying it to the project (thus impacting on engagement). As an example, the following Extract, which is also supported by Pamela and me in the data, synthesises the views of the majority of students:

Extract 6.49

T01	Nicolás: Anything else? Please be honest, the more you tell me, the better the next project will be. Do you find it difficult, do you find it overwhelming, lots of homework?
T02	Rachel: **The homework was hard.**
T03	David: **Some weeks the homework was hard but some weeks…**
T04	Kate: There was a lot of it, every week.
T05	Rachel: It's just like the verbs and the endings, I think we need to learn about that a bit more in class, before you give us the homework, so we can do that.
T06	Nicolás: Do you find the homework…
T07	Kate: It helped, in class if you got the hang of the homework and you needed to help in the story, just to put that in. How to tell.
T08	Nicolás: Are you saying that the homework helped?
T09	Kate: **Yes but it was hard at times, some of the ones I didn't get.**
T10	Nicolás: So would you recommend in that case that less homework and we work in class before you do the homework? Do you find it difficult to do the homework without having actually had a lesson?
T11	Rachel: **Before we start writing the stories, learn different … the stuff that's in the homework in lessons so we can put it into the project, instead of learning it at home and then putting it into the project, because if we don't understand it at home then we can't put it in the project.**

(API:02.05.2014 Rachel, David, Todd, and Kate)

Another aspect that the data suggests may have contributed to the inefficacy of the homework was that there was often some delay between submission of homework and feedback. Therefore, they could not (arguably) advance their stories and as a result, their levels of engagement would have been negatively affected. Although neither the students nor Pamela explicitly reported this issue, in the research journal this issue is reported several times over the course of the project.

Furthermore, it must be mentioned that Pamela agreed to correct the homework during the project while I would design it. This decision was made essentially because she needed to put official school stamps and provide feedback according to school regulations. This does not mean that I did not provide assistance when she was overwhelmed. Nevertheless, since communication was sometimes minimal sometimes I would not find out that the homework had not been corrected until the class started, by which time it was too late to take action.

Difficult students

Difficult students are by definition "students who are continually disruptive, persistently defiant, demanding of attention, or unmotivated" (Canter & Canter, 1993: 21). As already noted when describing the participants of this study (cf. 4.2), a large number met one or many of these characteristics. In addition, most of them were male, which presents unique challenges (see Houtte 2004, for a discussion). The data shows evidence that the 'difficult' nature of the students may have negatively impacted on their individual engagement in the project.

The evidence confirms that this group was, on average, composed of difficult students, which had significant implications for individual engagement. For example, in the following Extract Pamela says that the general low motivation of the students made them more likely to disengage:

Extract 6.50

T01 Nicolás: In your experience, is that normal, this kind of attitude?
T02 Pamela: Yes, for many students.
T03 Nicolás: To give up in the face of challenge?
T04 Pamela: Yes. Not all of them, and **I think in this group it's very extreme because it's quite a big group of students with very, very low motivation, so they will give up. Some of them copy each other, they are very young, they are Year 9, they are 13.**

(PI:24.05.2014)

This reality, in turn, seemed to have adverse effects on Pamela's mood. In the following Extract, for example, she acknowledges with little hesitation her reluctance to continue to do project work because of the group's characteristics:

Extract 6.51

T01	Nicolás: Awesome, thank you. Considering everything that has happened in this first project, **are you looking forward to the next one?**
T02	Pamela: **No**.
T03	Nicolás: Thank you for your honestly, I appreciate your honesty.
T04	Pamela: **No, but it's just I find the group really challenging, it's not to do with the project, it's to do with the challenge.**
T05	Nicolás: You're not looking forward to it at all?
T06	Pamela: **No, I'm looking forward to it a bit, but it's just the challenge, I find them really challenging, the level of wasted energy from them and from us, I think it's just a shame.**

(PI:24.05.2014)

In addition, in the data we find references demonstrating how the behaviour of certain students upset Pamela to such an extent that a strained atmosphere was created in the classroom, which eventually led to disengagement (i.e., indirect impact of difficult students on overall engagement). Examples of this have already been provided when discussing belongingness to the teacher.

This finding suggests that the reported problems in teacher-student relationships may have been partly triggered by students' attitudes and motivations, and should not simply be attributed to the teacher's personality. In fact, as also reported when discussing belongingness (to the teacher), Pamela's mood would automatically lighten in the absence of negative student behaviour. This is in line with prior research that has found that student disengagement diminishes teacher support (see Currie 2014, for a discussion).

Interruptions

Along with the engagement inhibitors mentioned thus far, there is the issue of interruptions during the project. Analysis of the data shows that several types of interruptions may have hampered overall student engagement, mostly because these

negatively affected students' level of competence due to their losing track of project work. These were (a) inspections from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) during which Pamela felt obliged to stop the language-learning project and reverted to traditional teaching (i.e., teacher-directed and more reliant on textbooks), (b) weeks off such as half-term (c) Pamela's absences due to other commitments in the school (e.g., invigilating exams, oral tests.).

Regarding the first type of interruption, two of the four groups interviewed after the project expressed their displeasure with switching between traditional and a PBL approach, and how that may have contributed to dampening their engagement during the project. In what follows we observe a couple of students suggesting that those switches interfered with their learning because they no longer had a clear idea of their purpose or motivation in the project:

Extract 6.52

T01	John: Yes, there are too many different things going on. You'd be doing one thing and then you'd be asked to stop doing the project and then do some book work. **Then you forget about everything because it's like too much going on. If you're focusing on the project, the words, the project and how you say them, then we do some bookwork straight afterwards, it mixes things up.**
T02	Nicolás: Oh, right. Sorry, when you say bookwork, what do you mean bookwork? Do you mean something completely different?
T03	John: Yes.
T04	Nicolás: Is that what happened during the project? Has that happened that you were doing project work and then you were doing something else?
T05	Hugo: Yes.
T06	John: **Yes, because we stopped doing it and did something else for a bit.**
T07	Hugo: **Then we went back on it and tried to change it. Then we stopped, did a few lessons without it and then we went back on it.**

(API:02.05.2014 John and Hugo)

Double periods

There were other time-related factors that, according to the teacher data, may have dampened general student engagement, namely lessons of two-hour duration. The problem with such lessons seemed to be that they were too long to sustain students' engagement and too far apart. There were lengthy gaps between Spanish classes

(sometimes a week or more) that further contributed to the students' losing track of project work. Consequently, engagement was negatively affected. In the next Extract the issues emanating from double periods are summarised by Pamela:

Extract 6.53

T01 Pamela: Some of them; **a two hour lesson is too long for them. One-hour lessons, they cope better with it. They can work and they have two hours.**
T02 Nicolás: What do you think about hour lessons?
T03 Pamela: It's much better; **one hour is the right time. It gives you a few minutes at the beginning to talk to them, joke with them, see how they are, change the mood, then you do some tasks. When they get – they lose their concentration; it's nearly the end, so you can bring the lesson together, have a bit of a reflection and go home.**
T04 Nicolás: So you think that two hours are..?
T05 Pamela: **Yes, it's a killer. It's no good for languages either.**
T06 Nicolás: No good for languages? Why is that? Is it because they get..?
T07 Pamela: **It's too long, they cannot concentrate.** I think it's better if it's shorter contact, more often. **The last time we saw them was last week. That's a whole week without languages.** […]
T08 Pamela: I know that **their behaviour is related to when we have them** because we have **Wednesday period, at the end of the day, it's really hard, it's halfway through the week. Then we have them Friday**.

(PI:24.05.2014)

Further data from the research journal seems to confirm that double periods were harmful to student engagement. The Extract that follows indicates this by making reference to the difficulties that double periods on Friday posed for engagement:

Extract 6.54

I think today was a success. I didn't have a lot of expectations as any other Friday. **Fridays seem to be very challenging especially for this group. And this is because a 2-hour class on a Friday morning can kill anyone as I have said many, many times**. If we can barely keep them in line in one-hour sessions how on earth do you expect me to do the same for longer periods?

(RJ:07.02.2014)

Teacher stress

Finally, Pamela's disposition throughout the project seemed to sometimes interfere with student engagement. The data reveals that Pamela was subject to continuous stress during the academic year brought about by school demands. This, in turn, affected the nature of the communication between us, which ultimately impacted on student

engagement in the project. To illustrate this, below is an Extract that potentially reveals how Pamela felt at times during the project:

Extract 6.55

After class I had a chat with Pamela because I saw her very stressed still. We had planned an interview for today but as usual she had to call it off. Anyway I tried to calm her down by letting her get things off her chest. I wish we could have recorded that conversation, **she confessed to me that she can't keep up any longer with her job. She has reached her maximum and this is something bad.** […] Pamela also said that **the school is in a really but situation at the moment because of the inspection and it is insane the amount of work she's doing.** She also said again that this is the worst group that she had ever had. She mentioned that the fact that they all come from different groups is one of the main reasons why the group is so bad. She says that in her experience when groups stay the same, behaviour problems tend to settle.

(RJ:19.03.2014)

The pressures mentioned above seemed to lead Pamela to redirect her time toward pressing school-related matters (e.g., marking, preparation for Ofsted inspections, etc.), rather than her project-related commitments. The difficulty she faced in sustaining her commitment to the project is frequently reported in the journal data, evidenced for example in difficulty in correcting homework in time, or in devoting time to design project lessons with me.

Concluding remarks

In this part of the analysis I have presented a list of factors that, based on the data, hindered student engagement during the project. It seems that as a result of my limited experience in the theory and practice of education, particularly on 'learning by doing' approaches such as project-based learning, mistakes were made in relation to the project design that negatively affected student engagement overall. I designed a project that did not accurately match the students' learning styles, knowledge of Spanish, and academic abilities. Another factor that seemed to dampen general student engagement was the students' low levels of motivation and disposition toward learning. According to the data, it seems that such levels of motivation were general and brought forward from previous years and subjects rather than being a direct result of the project. Interruptions with project work also appeared to negatively influence student engagement overall. The

fact that project work was significantly spaced out over the period resulted in students' forgetting what they had learnt. Consequently, they found it difficult to recall the necessary knowledge, giving them a reason to disengage. Furthermore, lessons of two-hour duration also seemed to hinder student engagement overall. Apparently, it was difficult for the students to maintain their levels of engagement for more than an hour. Finally, my lack of communication with Pamela on certain occasions also seemed to have negatively impacted on student-engagement. Pamela's gradual withdrawal from project-related commitments because of a demanding workload and associated stress seemed to hamper the engaging potential of the lessons given that students did not have the resources to continue working (i.e., homework) or the lesson was simply not effectively planned.

6.7 Action Research C1 Reflecting (III): Discussion

The aim of Cycle One was to assess the ProE model for the first time in order to foster student academic, social, emotional and cognitive engagement in a learning activity. I implemented a language-learning project designed according to the parameters of the ProE model. These parameters included making the project meaningful to the students and promoting feelings of autonomy, belongingness and competence.

Based on the results it can be argued that the answer to this study's research question (i.e., the extent to which the ProE model leads to student ASEC engagement) is not straightforward. Firstly, the global analysis of engagement does not provide a clear picture of what really happened in terms of student engagement. As discussed, this is because of divergent opinions in the data. Secondly, the temporal analysis of engagement shows this construct to be fully active on certain days, partially active on others, and inactive on other days. In view of this, arriving at a conclusion becomes somewhat problematic.

Nevertheless, despite the seeming lack of clarity, I believe that there are sufficient grounds to suggest that the implementation of the ProE model supported student ASEC engagement during the project. Two main arguments support this conclusion.

First, in the temporal analysis we observe several Episodes in which ASEC engagement with the project was identified amongst the majority of students (Table 6.10). Given that the elements deployed to achieve this goal were the four elements of the ProE model (i.e., meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence), we can assume that during such Episodes, in addition to seeing the project of value (meaningfulness) students felt:

a) Empowered (autonomy);
b) Connected to their group members (belongingness to peers)
c) A positive relationship with the teacher (belongingness to the teacher);
d) That the work given to them was within their range of ability (competence).

In other words, it can be assumed that when ASEC engagement occurred, students concentrated on project work (academic engagement), behaved appropriately (social engagement), enjoyed the work (emotional engagement), and tried to do the work (cognitive engagement). From this perspective, we can argue that the ProE model was a key factor contributing to ASEC engagement in such Episodes. This result would be consistent with a large number of research studies that link the elements of the ProE model to ASEC engagement (cf. 3.3.3). Therefore, it was expected that the ProE model would achieve its goal, as it brought four key facilitators of engagement together.

The second reason why I suggest that the ProE model fostered ASEC engagement is because it seems that when one or several of its elements were not present, engagement would in turn be negatively affected. As discussed in the analysis of the facilitators of

engagement, these elements particularly refer to competence and belongingness to the teacher.

Regarding competence, the fact that students found the project difficult in several instances appeared to dampen their overall engagement (cf. 6.6.2). This issue is not new and has been investigated thoroughly across educational research (e.g., Bandura 1977; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Boggiano et al., 1988; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Accordingly, while students with high perceptions of ability are likely to engage in learning activities in terms of their behaviour, emotion, and cognition, perceived lack of ability on the other hand is bound to bring about disengagement (see also, Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003 and Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

As for belongingness to the teacher, it seems that strained teacher-student relationships also diminished engagement on certain occasions (cf. 6.6.2). In connection to this, there is a large number of empirical studies that show that feelings of relatedness to teachers play a key role in shaping student engagement (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Lam et al., 2012; Naeghel et al., 2014; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel 1997). The underlying message of such studies is that a warm and supportive teacher can increase student engagement while the opposite can diminish it.

Although it is not clear from the analyses which dimension(s) of engagement the absence of these two elements directly affected, in the temporal analysis we observe that those days in which engagement plummeted it did so in more than one dimension. This reinforces the argument that the dimensions of engagement are interconnected (see Harris 2011; Lee 2013; Li & Lerner, 2012; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Reeve & Lee, 2014; Skinner et al., 2008; Skinner et al., 2009). Particularly, this shows a strong relationship between dimensions when they are in the negative. That is, when the project was not in line with students' preferences, that seemed to affect engagement in multiple dimensions, not just one. This is an interesting finding because it highlights the key role

that the facilitators of competence and belongingness to the teacher play in shaping student ASEC engagement, especially when they are not present. This is something to expect since these are regarded as the psychological and developmental needs of adolescents (cf. 3.3.3). Thus, depriving students from such needs would be likely to result in negative engagement outcomes.

In light of the above, we may conclude that the ProE model can promote ASEC engagement so long as it is fully deployed. This involves making the project meaningful to the students as well as promoting feelings of autonomy, belongingness, and competence in students. As I have discussed, failure to support students' perceptions of ability and less positive teacher-student relationships can have detrimental effects for overall engagement. Thus, these elements need special attention to ensure that the goals of the ProE model are accomplished.

Now, in addition to nurturing meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness, and competence, the results of the analyses of this research cycle suggest that it is also fundamental to pay attention to context-specific elements. This is because they can interfere with student ASEC engagement in activities and thus inhibit the effectiveness of the ProE model. In this Cycle, the following factors stood in the way of engagement:

- Shallow pedagogical knowledge
- Difficult students
- Interruptions
- Double periods
- Teacher stress

Starting with pedagogical knowledge, Blumenfeld (1991: 382) argues that:

> Project-based instruction affords exciting opportunities for teachers and students to explore problems in depth and to draw on concepts across subjects. However, these opportunities assume that teachers possess knowledge of content included in projects, understand how to explain or

> illustrate content and teach learning strategies, and hold belief systems compatible with a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. These requirements are not easily met.

It is not surprising then that my limited pedagogical knowledge, mostly with regard to my inexperience with PBL, resulted in a project that was beyond the students' academic skills and capabilities amongst other things. This, in turn, seemed to have a negative impact on the students' perceived competence, then on student-engagement, and ultimately on learning. The difficulty of implementing learning-by-doing approaches in school contexts for first timers, has been widely reported on in the practitioner literature (see Edutopia.org, for examples). The conclusions of these works agree that PBL needs to be implemented with care and gradually so that students transition smoothly into it. Moreover, as Thoonen (2011: 355) notes, "It often takes years to master a new way of teaching effectively, so that it benefits student learning and motivation". Thus, although I tried my best to make PBL work the results prove that I should have started smaller and slower because the project experience became an abrupt and significant change for the majority of the students. And that, of course, seemed to have unfortunate consequences for engagement.

Regarding the students' characteristics, analysis of the data also identified that their low levels of motivation may have negatively contributed to ASEC engagement. Previous work has documented that motivation is necessary (but not sufficient) for student engagement (see Fredricks 2014, for a discussion). From this it can therefore be expected that students with low levels of motivation to learn are going to be more reluctant to engage. Interestingly, the results show that the ProE model still managed to engage students despite their low levels of motivation. This is an important finding because it underlies the potential of the ProE model to foster ASEC engagement even in challenging contexts.

Regular interruptions also seemed to obstruct overall ASEC engagement with the project. As the analyses show, the project was interrupted several times by external

investigations from the Office of Standards in Education, weeks of holidays, and by Pamela's absences. Interestingly, very little is known about the damaging role of interruptions on student engagement in the educational literature. This issue has, however, been explored in the area of human factors and ergonomics. Studies in this area provide enough empirical evidence to suggest that interruptions have detrimental effects on performance (e.g., Cades et al., 2010; Foroughi et al., 2014; Spira & Feintuch, 2005). A case in point is a recent study of Foroughi and colleagues (Foroughi et al., 2014) where it was found that interruptions negatively affected the quality of work of students who were writing an essay. The results of this body of research supports the idea that interruptions can have a negative influence upon student engagement, thus making this finding of interest for engagement research.

Another issue that seemed to interfere with the purposes of the ProE model was the two-hour long lessons. As previously mentioned, this posed a challenge for student engagement because of the students' inability to focus for long periods. There was also the issue of lengthy gaps between MFL lessons. Considering the former, the issue of adolescent concentration has been widely discussed in education, and especially in neuroscience. Studies in this field have recently shown that the reason why students find it difficult to concentrate for long periods of time and are easily distracted is because their brains have not yet developed a capacity for self-control and regulation (see Steinberg 2014, for a rationale). It can therefore be argued that adolescents' attention spans are naturally very limited especially when they are not physically active. The finding of my research adds further empirical evidence to this volume of literature from an educational perspective.

Finally, the last contextual inhibitor of engagement identified in Cycle One was Pamela's stress level. As discussed, Pamela's demanding workload took her away from project commitments. This seemed to have an indirect effect on student engagement

overall. As previously mentioned, we were not able to collaborate on the project design as well as in its implementation on several occasions. As a result, I made pedagogical mistakes that could have potentially been avoided had I had her input. The issue of teacher stress is gaining traction in educational literature (e.g., Helms-Lorenz et al., 2012; Yorimitsu et al., 2014). A recent survey of 3,500 members of the largest teaching union in the UK found that teacher stress and professional burnout is soaring in the UK (NASUWT 2015). Some of its most significant findings were that 87% of the respondents reported suffering from stress, 67% said that stress was affecting their mental and physical health, and around half of them acknowledged having sought medical assistance for their health-related problems. This finding then lends support to the hypothesis that teacher stress may indirectly dampen student engagement. This is an issue that to date has received little (if not any) attention in engagement research.

To conclude this section I would like to contrast the results of the asystematic analysis (i.e., practitioner account) against the results of the systematic analysis (i.e., researcher account). This is so that I can substantiate the insider perspective of the events (i.e., asystematic analysis conducted as Cycle One was happening) with an outsider standpoint (i.e., systematic analyses conducted as Cycle One was completed) in the hope of obtaining a more accurate picture of the issues surrounding the ProE model implementation process in this research cycle.

It seems that, in the asystematic analysis, I was able to capture most of the issues concerning the implementation of the ProE model. For example, I was able to identify issues concerning the role of the facilitator of competence and the facilitator of belongingness (to the teacher). Also I identified that my shallow pedagogical knowledge posed a challenge to the implementation of the ProE model and thus overall student ASEC engagement. Similarly, the regular amount of interruptions to the project was also

detected as an issue. Finally, it was also perceived that Pamela's disposition negatively impacted on the implementation of the ProE model.

Nevertheless, there are marked differences between the asystematic and the systematic analyses. It seems that in some instances in the asystematic analysis, I identified specific parts of the issues, rather than the issue itself, while in others I did not perceive the issue at all. To illustrate, in the asystematic analysis I found that 'empowering students did not work as expected'. In the systematic analysis, this was discussed as part of the larger theme of 'shallow pedagogical knowledge'. The same applies to the identified issues in the asystematic analysis of 'homework not successful' and 'problems with group sizes and group work', which would be part of the broader theme of 'shallow pedagogical knowledge' in the systematic analysis as well. Furthermore, in the asystematic analysis, the issue of 'Pamela did not seem to feel at ease with the PBL approach' would be associated with the facilitator of 'belongingness (to the teacher)' in the systematic analysis, whereas the issue of 'Pamela gradually withdrew her collaboration' would come under the broader theme of 'Pamela's stress'. However, in the asystematic analysis the ProE model inhibitors of 'difficult students' and 'double periods' were not mentioned despite being featured as key themes in the systematic analysis.

In light of the preceding, we might then conclude that the results of the asystematic analysis of this project cycle were very close to those of the systematic analysis. This would suggest that I was able to gain a broad understanding of the issues surrounding the implementation of the ProE model by collecting data with the help of sound instruments and subsequently by familiarising myself with the data (through repeated reading of notes and questionnaire results, and by listening to the interviews). This would be congruent with the claims made in certain types of practitioner research such as exploratory practice (Allwright 2003, 2005) in the field of language learning, where it is reported that unsophisticated methods of analysis such as reflective practices are able

to provide a comprehensive picture of the events practices (see Denscombe 2010, for a discussion).

In contrast, the fact that the systematic analysis revealed issues that went undetected in the asystematic analysis (e.g., difficult students) or were actually part of larger issues (e.g., empower students), calls into question the feasibility of forms of practitioner research that seek to achieve full understanding through reflective practices (e.g., exploratory practice). It can be suggested then that we not evade systematic analyses in practitioner research if the focus lies in seeking deep understanding of a phenomenon in question, as this might bring about incomplete results.

Finally, the fact that the asystematic analysis was unable to provide as much detail as the systematic analysis on those elements that interfered with the implementation of the ProE model means that, some issues highlighted in the systematic analysis would be only partially addressed in the second cycle, since I was only able to identify some of them (e.g., teacher stress), or not identify them at all in the asystematic analysis (i.e., difficult students). In turn, this means that such issues would likely reoccur in a second implementation of the ProE model.

Chapter Seven: Action Research Cycle Two (C2)

7.1 Introduction

Cycle Two follows the same structure as the previous cycle. Thus, the following sections develop each one of the AR moves: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

7.2 Action Research C2: Planning

The second project implemented was guided by the question: "How can Spanish help me succeed in my future career". This project consisted of firstly, researching the topic and secondly, producing an individual report, which would respond to the aforementioned question following the pattern below:

- Introducing myself
- What I like to do
- My personality in the workplace
- What I would like to do
- How Spanish can help me with this

Finally, using the knowledge gained in the individual report, the students would work in groups to create a video in Spanish, which would answer the guiding question in a creative way (e.g., imitating a BBC broadcast, etc.).

Similarly to the previous project, this project had a dual objective. It sought to promote Spanish learning in an authentic way while developing life skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity (Boss et al., 2013). In addition, this project also aimed to promote the career value of foreign language learning, which as previously mentioned (cf. 2.3), is one of the two elements of my two-fold intervention to

improve attitudes. Overall then, this language-learning project was designed to foster ASEC engagement by the implementation of the ProE model and to increase students' awareness of the value of learning languages.

Coming out of the first cycle, I decided to design a much more structured project. In practical terms, this meant that (a) the students did not have much control over the project's implementation (e.g., rather than letting the students set achievement goals for themselves, we determined the daily project-goals), and (b) the students mostly worked individually during the writing phase. This was the compromise that Pamela and I agreed to after completing the first project so as to boost her involvement (cf. 6.5).

It is worth mentioning that restricting the project's structure would constrain the full deployment of two of the elements of the ProE model: autonomy and belongingness (to peers). It is expected that the concrete project structure, although potentially beneficial in terms of improving teacher-student relationships (i.e., belongingness to the teacher), may adversely affect ASEC engagement. In other words, given the significant impact that teacher academic and personal support can have on student ASEC engagement, (as observed in the first cycle) I deliberately chose to focus more on belongingness to the teacher than on autonomy and belongingness (to peers). In fact, I felt that this project could not advance without positive teacher-student relationships.

7.3 Action Research C2: Acting

As part of the actional phase of this cycle, I implemented the second project over a nine-week period, totalling 18 hours of class time (Table 7.1). The project began with a class discussion on the value of learning languages. For this, I invited three guest speakers who had successfully mastered at least one foreign language, and who also regularly use foreign languages in their jobs. The aim was to sensitise the students about the importance of speaking foreign languages in the workplace. Next, Pamela and I

followed up on the discussion from the previous session by playing and discussing some videos of celebrities talking about the importance of learning foreign languages. At the end of the session we presented the project along with its structure, steps and objectives.

Once the guidelines were established, the students entered the actional phase by gathering information from the Internet that would help them write the report. They began with a reflective activity in which they tried to identify the number of jobs in the UK where speaking a foreign language was an essential requirement. Next, they started the writing element of the project, i.e., writing the individual report. To guide their production, Pamela and I focused every session on a different section of the report. Thus, we would do activities with the students, either individually or in pairs, centred on the particular topic in order to equip them with the necessary knowledge to complete that section on their own.

The next step of the session involved writing up the section. In order to help the students, at this stage, we provided a handout that encompassed useful connectors and phrases in Spanish. Furthermore, the students also had access to other resources such as the Internet (in some cases), dictionaries, and textbooks. Finally, once the report was finished and Pamela and I had provided feedback, the students moved into groups for the final part of the project. This time, learning from the first project (cf. 6.5), the groups were partly determined by Pamela and me, and partly chosen by the students; they were also reduced from five members to three. For this recording phase, in their groups, the students prepared a script and then recorded their video. This was presented on the last day to me and two other teachers (Pamela was not present that day), and peer-evaluated in terms of communication and creativity.

7.4 Action Research C2: Observing

This stage of the cycle occurred similarly to the first cycle (cf. 6.4). The only difference was that I was only able to interview Pamela once (i.e., at the end of the cycle) rather than twice (i.e., at the beginning and end of the cycle) because of her demanding schedule. This interview took place in mid August when she returned from holiday.

Table 7.1: Description of data collection in Cycle Two

AR Cycle	Duration	Begins	Ends	Data collected
Cycle 2	9 Weeks	9 May 2014	16 July 2014	1. After-project questionnaires (N=17). These questionnaires furnished an initial understanding of student ASEC engagement as well as the factors that promoted and diminished it in the present project, and also served as the basis for subsequent interviews. 2. Open-ended questionnaires. I collected approximately three open-ended questionnaires from almost every student participating in the project (51 in total), documenting their views and experiences throughout the project in terms of engagement. 3. Group interviews with students (N=19): After the project's completion, I conducted four group interviews to assess the engaging nature of the project, and to complement (and verify) the information given in the after-project questionnaires with thick description, and in the context of a group conversation. 4. Interview with Pamela: After the project was finished, I interviewed Pamela to capture her overall opinion on student engagement with the project. 5. Research Journal: I kept a diary in which I documented my daily experience as a researcher-teacher throughout the project.

7.5 Action Research C2 Reflecting (I): Practitioner Account

Similarly to the first cycle, in the practitioner account I focus on describing the outcomes of the ProE model's implementation focusing especially on the key problematic areas found in its deployment, based on my perceptions as well as on (some of) the data obtained. Due to the fact that the second project was the last one and no further changes needed to be made, I did not conduct an asystematic analysis of the data

on the problematic areas arising from the ProE model implementation (cf. 6.5), rather, I reflected on the overall performance of the model in this cycle.

What follows are my overall perceptions of the ProE model implementation; a reflection that I did at the end of the project, which is grounded on what I witnessed during the course of the project. They are also based on what I heard at the post-project interviews with the students. Based on these, I argue that this project had a (much) better impact on student ASEC engagement than the first. And I attribute these results to the following causes:

- The students seemed to perceive the project as more authentic and valuable because it was related to something they were interested in: their future. The homework also seemed to help to increase the perceived value of the project. This time I ensured that it was well connected to the project so that students would see its relevance to the overall project.
- The structured nature of the project seemed to allow for a better control of student understanding, which allowed me (and Pamela) to intervene and ensure that no one was be left behind in terms of content and skill knowledge. This possibly contributed to perceived student-competence. Furthermore, it seems that this type of project structure also made Pamela more receptive to PBL because it more closely aligned to her personal teaching style. The result was better teacher-student relationships.
- The project was aligned with the students' level of competency. This seemed to address the problem of low self-efficacy found in the first project.
- Two problematic students were removed from the classroom. That action had an overall, positive impact on the quality of the relationship between Pamela and the group.

However, there also seemed to be factors that hindered student engagement. The most salient ones were as follows:

- The project experienced interruptions such as the ones reported in the first cycle (Ofsted inspections, religious activities, etc.). However, this time such interruptions were more frequent though not as lengthy. In addition, there were several days in which there was a substitute teacher because Pamela was involved in GCSE examinations.
- Although Pamela was much more favourably disposed to this project, there was indirect evidence in the post-project interviews with students that the working environment for project work was not always felt to be positive.
- Although the structured nature of the project allowed for a better control of student-learning by Pamela and me, it was negatively perceived by the students who reported that they would have gained much more from the experience had they been able to work in groups for the writing phase instead of just for the recording phase.

7.6 Action Research C2 Reflecting (II): Researcher Account

As in Cycle One (cf. 6.6), the aim of the researcher account is to provide a comprehensive picture of the results of the implementation of the ProE model on student ASEC engagement. I explore the extent to which the implementation resulted in ASEC engagement by systematically analysing the data collected from four different perspectives: the global analysis of ASEC engagement, the temporal analysis of ASEC engagement, the analysis of the facilitators of engagement, and the analysis of the inhibitors of engagement.

7.6.1 C2 Global Analysis of ASEC Engagement

As in Cycle One, the analytical framework presented in 3.2.3 guides the global analysis of engagement. The evidence of ASEC engagement is therefore organised around the indicators of concentration on project work (i.e., academic engagement), prosocial behaviour (i.e., social engagement), happiness (i.e., emotional engagement), and effort to develop the project (i.e., cognitive engagement). Like in Cycle One, for this analysis I draw heavily on the data obtained by means of the research instruments that explored student engagement retrospectively. These instruments are the post-project questionnaires and the post-project interviews with both the students and Pamela.

Academic engagement

Based on the data analysed, it seems that, in general, students were academically engaged for the duration of the project. This can be inferred mainly from an agreement between student and teacher data. Looking at student data first, from I-statements 8 and 9 below it can be interpreted that virtually all respondents reported to have been concentrating on project work.

Table 7.2: Questionnaire results regarding academic engagement (i.e., concentration)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
8. In this project I was focused on project work	0	1	13	1
9. I completed all the tasks we had (e.g., individual, pair activities, group activities)	0	0	4	11

This view harmonises with post-project interview data where the students reported having stayed on task in the project. Interestingly, three out of the five groups of students interviewed stated that one of the reasons for this was that some naughty

students left the classroom for the second project (see Extract 7.1 below for an example).

Extract 7.1

T01 Nicolás: Do you think the class had better behaviour in the second project?
T02 Daniel: Yes.
T03 Rachel: Yes.
T04 Nicolás: Why do you think that was?
T05 Daniel: Because people have gone out the class haven't they, like they just were naughty.
[…]
T06 Nicolás: So Daniel, when you say that people were out of the class, what people do you refer to?
T07 Daniel: **Yes because they normally distract people and everyone's a bit more focussed now.**

(API:17.07.2014 Rachel, Daniel, and Bob)

Although this issue is discussed when addressing social engagement, it is worth mentioning that this finding suggests, first, that there is a close relationship between concentration and prosocial behaviour. This is an interesting finding because the relationships between academic and social engagement have not been studied in detail. This is may be partly because most researchers embrace the tripartite conceptualisation of engagement in which behavioural engagement usually covers both task concentration and positive behaviour (see Christenson et al., 2008, for a discussion). Second, the finding also suggests that misbehaviour of some students can poison the overall classroom atmosphere and as a result, dampen the overall engagement of an entire class. This is an issue that has been largely discussed in classroom management research (see Evertson & Weinstein, 2006, for a discussion).

Pamela too agreed with the students' views. In the post-project interview, she specified that the majority of students were focused in this project, and also that this was largely due to the fact that two students were removed from the class (for accumulating misconduct reports). This is shown in the following Extract:

Extract 7.2

T01 Nicolás: What do you think in this project? What do you think about their behaviour?
T02 Pamela: **I was really happy with them in the second one.**
T03 Nicolás: OK.

T04 Pamela: **So we cannot forget that we had to remove our two problems – two students were very disruptive. And also one of, not only disruptive, he was, the motivation was so low that the rest was following him. So once they were removed – but this was not the only reason**, OK, it is the project, the project, and b) work together – yeah, their behaviour in general.
T05 Nicolás: Would you say that removing these students affected your whole approach to the project?
T06 Pamela: **No I don't think so. I think, umm…, it made my life easier because there were no disruptions there all the time but also at least how I see it when these students were not there, even before they were removed, the whole class worked better, the whole atmosphere lifted** and I don't think it was only related to me.
T07 Nicolás: **OK. So they were a bad influence for the rest, right?**
T08 Pamela: **Yes, for the rest.**
T09 Nicolás That's interesting. **So, you say that in the project overall the behaviour was better?**
T10 Pamela: **Yes.**
T11 Nicolás: **Better than the first one?**
T12 Pamela: **It was better than the first one.** The second project worked better. And I think they… it worked fairly well, yeah.

(PI:14.08.2014)

In the same Extract we observe that Pamela also noted that, overall, social engagement was positive in this project. She also acknowledged that behaviour improved from the first project to the second.

Social engagement

As can be inferred from the above, it seems that in the second project the majority of students showed prosocial behaviour. This is not only evident in the teacher data but also in the students' self-reports. Questionnaire data reveals that, in general, students behaved in line with social classroom and school norms. This is illustrated in I-statements 7 and 11 of Table 7.3 below, which shows that the majority of the students reported behaving appropriately and without disruption during the project.

Table 7.3: Questionnaire results regarding social engagement (i.e., prosocial behaviour)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
7. In this project I paid attention to my teachers	0	5	7	3
11. In this project I was told off by the teacher	4	9	2	0

In addition, the students also made reference to social engagement during the project in the post-project interviews. Three out of the five groups interviewed noted that the

overall behaviour of the classroom was not only positive but also better than in project one. Extracts 7.3 and 7.4 illustrate this:

Extract 7.3

T01 Nicolás: In terms of behaviour, do you think that people behaved better in the second project?
T02 Randolph: **Yes**.
T03 Nicolás: Than the first one?
T04 Randolph: **Yes, because we got it finished in, like – asides from the sheet that we had to do, the second part of it was finished within like two lessons, which is more than the other one**.
T05 Charlie: More than we finished in the whole thing with the other one.

(API:17.07.2014 Charlie and Randolph)

Extract 7.4

T01 Nicolás: Do you think that people behaved better in the second project than in the first one?
T02 Helen: About the same.
T03 Sharon: **Yes, I think they did**.
T04 David: **Yes, I think they did.**

(API:17.07.2014 Sharon, David, and Helen)

The above findings are also supported by my views on the project. In the following Extract, for example, my conclusions on student engagement, corresponding to the first 9 out of 12 Episodes of the project (i.e., the writing element of the project), show that the overall behaviour had thus far been positive and better than the overall first project:

Extract 7.5

Overall I can see that they are learning even more because they are expanding on what they wrote in part 1 of the project. There has been cognitive engagement, **behaviour wise they are really good compared to the first project** and emotions wise, they seem happy with the project as they are not complaining about it.

(RJ:04.07.2014)

Emotional engagement

Regarding emotional engagement, the data analysed shows mixed results for happiness during project work. While questionnaire data and Pamela's (and my) comments seem to suggest that most students were happy when working on the project, the post-project interviews seem to indicate that this was not necessarily the reality, at least as regards the first part of the project, which was the longest. More than half of the students

expressed their unhappiness with a major part of the project, which lasted for 9 out of the 12 Episodes. Given that students know their emotional reactions to learning activities better than teachers (cf. 3.2.3), I conclude that overall emotional engagement was not achieved in this project.

Considering the questionnaire data, the following two Tables show that the majority of students responded somewhat positively regarding emotional engagement. In Table 7.4, most students reported happiness, little anxiety, and little annoyance with the project. Furthermore, two thirds of the students also reported that the project was motivating (Table 7.5). I-statement 6, however, depicts a contrasting reality, with two thirds of the respondents claiming not looking forward to project work. This seems to be a rather surprising finding given that most students provided positive responses for emotional engagement in the other questions — except for I-statement 13 where some boredom is reported. This issue adds to the long list of drawbacks of using questionnaires in educational research (cf. 6.6.1.1). In this particular case, it would have been necessary to probe further in order to know the reason behind such a discrepancy.

Table 7.4: Questionnaire results regarding emotional engagement I (i.e., happiness)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
12. When doing project work I was happy	0	5	9	1
13. When doing project work I was bored	0	10	5	0
14. When doing project work I was anxious	8	7	0	0
15. When doing project work I was fed up	1	9	5	0

Table 7.5: Questionnaire results regarding emotional engagement II (i.e., happiness)

	A lot	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
5. The project was motivating	1	9	5	0
6. I looked forward to project work	0	5	9	1

These relatively positive results are slightly challenged by the post-project interview data — revealing once more the superficial understanding that can be achieved through this instrument. For example, four out of the five groups reported that the teacher's disposition and behaviour (i.e., belongingness to teacher) demotivated them from doing project work. The following Extract illustrates the impact of teacher disposition on general student engagement:

Extract 7.6

T01 Sharon: **Yes, because she's so strict, everyone decides to act against her, because she's so strict. But if she gave us more of a chance, everyone would start respecting her more and give her-**
T02 Nicolás: Really?
T03 David: Yes.
T04 Sharon: Yes and not be as badly behaved, do you know what I mean?
T05 Nicolás: Okay, yes.
T06 Helen: She's not listening to us.
T07 Sharon: Yes, say if we were allowed to speak quietly. But it's sort of like every single work we try and do well, is silence. If we were allowed to speak, just a little bit of talk (Laughter)-
[…]
T08 Sharon: No because we're not naughty, that's what I mean, that's what annoys us.
T09 David: **No, if we came in with a positive attitude, when we came in the lesson, then-**
T10 Sharon: **Yes, by five minutes it's just gone**.
T11 David: **Yes, obviously people will be- if she's happy, or a positive attitude, everybody else would be better. But if she's in a bad mood it's annoying**.

(API:17.07.2014 Sharon, David, and Helen)

If these responses were in fact true, this would mean that the issue of poor teacher-student connection (i.e., belongingness to the teacher), and its subsequent impact on (emotional) student engagement, may have been also present in this project. I discuss this issue in detail when addressing the facilitators of engagement.

Moreover, three out of the five groups reported that the first part of the project (the longest part), that is, the part in which they had to write individually, was not very enjoyable. They mostly blamed it on doing individual work that was not creative instead of group work. As previously mentioned, this part of the project covered 9 out of its 12 Episodes. I therefore feel that the findings above should be regarded as significant to determining emotional engagement in the project. The following Extract provides an example of student dissatisfaction with individual work; they commented that the project would have been more enjoyable had they been allowed to work in groups, and also had Pamela exercised less control over them (i.e., allowed them greater autonomy):

Extract 7.7

T01 Nicolás: Okay. What about the first part?
T02 Todd: **That was boring.**
T03 Tom: **That was well boring.**
T04 Desmond: Yes, but at least we learnt stuff [Crosstalk].
T05 Tom: **'Cause Miss Pamela was like, "Do this, do this, do this," and we were like...**
T06 Desmond: She's quite strict.
T07 Tom: She's quite strict.
T08 Desmond: Yes.
T09 Nicolás: Okay and so what would you have preferred to do instead of that?
T10 Desmond: **If we did more group work.**
T11 Tom: **Did more group work.**
T12 Desmond: If we did the writing task as a group and then do the video after.

(API:17.07.2014 Todd, Tom, and Desmond)

The contents in Extracts 7.6 and 7.7 suggest that the lack of perceived autonomy and belongingness to both peers and the teacher might have had a negative impact on emotional engagement. This is a finding that would further support the assumption that all the elements of the ProE model must be effectively deployed so as to achieve ASEC engagement. This issue will be further developed when addressing the facilitators of engagement.

Furthermore, again, three out of the five groups interviewed, expressed their disappointment with the first part of the project because it did not promote creative expression (i.e., it was a traditional writing exercise). Here is an example that represents the views of the three groups:

Extract 7.8

T01 Sawyer: **They could have done more creative stuff**.
T02 Kate: Yes, more creative stuff because it was just literally –
T03 Claire: Than just writing and writing.
T04 Kate: Yes, the video was the only creative thing in it but you hardly got –
[…]
T05 Nicolás: Is there anything you would improve for the future so if you had to do it again?
T06 Kate: **Yes, more creative**.
T07 Nicolás: More creativity?
T08 Kate: I find that's what a lot of people like now.
T09 Sawyer: It's all about technology now.
T10 Kate: **I find the more you get older, the more you get used to school and used to just writing, just looking at a board. Whereas if you're doing videos and posters and just loads of creative things then I just find it more interesting**.
T11 Nicolás: Okay, so we have more creativity on the one hand, you mentioned - ?
T12 Sawyer: **It would be nice to use the computers as well. We could do a PowerPoint on all the tenses. We could do a PowerPoint on …**

(API:17.07.2014 Kate, Sawyer and Claire)

The above examples, however, contrast with the teacher data; according to which the students were emotionally engaged overall during the project. This is suggested by the following Extract:

Extract 7.9

T01 Nicolás: OK. So what about now. Let's look at the emotional engagement – happiness – were they happy or were they sad – were they bored or were they anxious in this project. How would you define it in general terms?
T02 Pamela: **They were a bit anxious at the beginning, insecurity**, because I think after the failure of the writing of the story of most of them – most of them couldn't write and they felt a bit frustrated, umm… so they were a bit anxious about that writing part. **But they got over it – they overcame that and they were doing OK.** But the funny thing is that they kept checking everything with us – "Is that OK, Miss"? "Is that OK Sir"? "Is that OK"? "Sir, can you help me"? "Can you read that"? But, you know, they did it very, very often. They needed permanent reassurance on what they were doing.
[…]
T03 Nicolás: So do you think they were more confident…
T04 Pamela: In the second one? Yes, definitely. They learnt more, they were more confident, yes. And **they were happy and proud of themselves.**

(PI:14.08.2014)

Interestingly, when combining Pamela's comments with my reflection in Extract 7.5 above (i.e., social engagement), it seems that she was not the only one to apparently misread the students' emotions. My comment, 'emotions wise, **they seem happy** with the project as they are not complaining about it', which is based on the first part of the project, reveals that I too misread the students' levels of happiness.

Overall, these findings, namely Pamela's and my seemingly distorted views of reality, would lend further support to the assumption that teachers are not always the best assessors of student (emotional) engagement (cf. 6.6.1.1). Additionally, such findings would also further support the widespread notion that emotional engagement is less observable than other dimensions of engagement (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for a discussion).

Cognitive engagement

Finally, as far as cognitive engagement is concerned, the data suggests that, overall, the students made an effort to advance the project. This is suggested by an agreement in the opinions of both teachers and the students. Table 7.6 below shows that students perceived themselves as having worked hard on the project. This is particularly visible in I-statements 18 and 20 where more than two thirds of the students report to have put forth effort to advance project work by not giving up easily in the face of challenge. Furthermore, I-statements 17 and 19 provide additional support to the conclusion that students were psychologically invested in the project.

Table 7.6: Questionnaire results regarding cognitive engagement (i.e., mental effort)

	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time
17. In this project I did more than just the work assigned	3	7	3	2
18. In this project I gave up in the difficult parts	7	6	2	0
19. In this project I wanted to learn as much as possible	0	5	6	4
20. In this project I tried to finish tasks even when they were difficult	0	3	7	5

Pamela also shared similar views to the students. During the post-project interview she repeatedly pointed out the mental effort put forth by the students in the second project.

In the Extract that follows, we observe Pamela's satisfaction with the results of the project in terms of cognitive engagement:

Extract 7.10

T01 Nicolás: OK. Interesting. **So would you say there was preference for hard work instead of preference for easy work. I mean, do you think that they made an effort then, along the project, I mean in general**?
T02 Pamela: Yes – I think, yes, yes, yes.
T03 Nicolás: So they just didn't sit back?
T04 Pamela: **No, no, no. At the beginning they wanted to sit back but no, they were engaged.** The activities, the way they were organized was good, you know. That was great from you because you said we really need to go back to the basics but I was a bit like – dah! – they know that they should know but from very basic they went to quite a good level.
T05 Nicolás: OK.
T06 Pamela: They are as students I think a bit lazy in general. **But then they made an effort but we cannot forget the type of students we have, you know. A very difficult group inherently lazy, umm… very low motivation so the fact that they did some work, they completed homework and they wrote long sentences was a big step**.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Interestingly, in her comments referring to cognitive engagement Pamela associated mental effort with student learning (see Extract 7.11 below). In fact, she noted that student learning during the second project was greater that in the first one, and as I discuss later when addressing the facilitators of engagement, this seems to be partly related to the fact that students found the project within their academic level of competence. Overall then, this former finding suggests an association between effort focused on learning and mastering the material, and subsequently learning. This is a finding that is consistent with those obtained in previous studies in engagement research (see Fredricks 2014, for a discussion).

Extract 7.11

T01 Nicolás: What about the, umm…, actual Spanish learning? Were they also or engaged in that sense?
T02 Pamela: **Oh yes. You could see a difference. They were stronger – their sentences were stronger but not only that, umm…, the way they approached the learning was fantastic – was proper learning happening in the classroom.**
T03 Nicolás: Really?
T04 Pamela: **Well, even Hugo, you know, was trying** – he was creating good things. They saw the structure – they, they knew how to move on – yeah. And you know, like, they were speaking, they were like, happy to talk.

(PI:14.08.2014)

To conclude, it seems that my conclusions regarding cognitive engagement and learning during the project are concurrent with the views identified thus far. This can be observed, for example, in Extract 7.12, which has already been presented above:

Extract 7.12

Overall I can see that they are learning even more because they are expanding on what they wrote in part 1 of the project. There has been cognitive engagement, behaviour wise they are really good compared to the first project and emotions wise, they seem happy with the project as they are not complaining about it.

(RJ:04.07.2014)

Concluding remarks

Having analysed global ASEC engagement, it seems that the students engaged at the academic, social, and cognitive levels in the second project. However, they did not seem to achieve emotional engagement. These results contrast with those of studies that report dynamic relationships between emotional and behavioural engagement in the classroom (cf. 6.6.1.2). For example, Skinner et al. (2008) found a strong dynamic relationship between emotional engagement and behavioural engagement (dimensions which were conceptualised in terms similar to this study) and a weaker, but still present, dynamic relationship between behavioural engagement and emotional engagement. This analysis would suggest that emotional engagement did not contribute to changes in academic and social engagement (my interpretation of behavioural engagement). Moreover, academic and social engagement (i.e., behavioural engagement) did not contribute to changes in emotional engagement.

It must be mentioned that neither the results nor the interpretations of the global analysis of ASEC engagement should be accepted as final. This is mainly because of the issue of studying student-engagement retrospectively (referring to both teachers and students), where factors such as one's mood on the day of being interviewed or surveyed or one's ability to recall long-term endeavours with accuracy, may shape participants' responses in one direction or another (cf. 6.6.1.1). Hence, the need for a temporal analysis of

ASEC engagement in order to obtain a much clearer picture of how and why students engaged in the project. In that regard, the aforementioned finding also suggests that contrary to what I thought, one should not attempt to infer emotional engagement from behavioural engagement (i.e., academic plus social). This is a shortcoming in the temporal analysis of the first project (cf. 6.6.1.2) and the reason why I am not making such inferences in the temporal analysis of the second project.

7.6.2 C2 Temporal Analysis of ASEC Engagement

Now I will present the temporal analysis of ASEC engagement for the second language-learning project, which consisted of 12 Episodes. Similar to Cycle One, in each Episode, I examined all the data sources available so as to explore engagement at the academic, social, emotional and cognitive levels. However, due to the fact that there are only two instruments that looked into student engagement with the project across time, i.e., the research journal and reflection sheets, I draw heavily on these for this analysis (see 6.6.1.2, for a justification).

The Table that follows provides a description of this project's twelve Episodes:

Table 7.7: Description of the Episodes of the language-learning project C2

Episode	Title	Date	Description
Episode 1	Guest speakers	09.05.2014	The project started with a Q&A session with four guest speakers. The aim of the session was to increase student awareness of the advantages of speaking foreign languages for one's future, both in the UK and abroad. The speakers were well-travelled individuals that spoke one or more foreign languages and worked or had worked in different areas and countries.
Episode 2	Project value	14.05.2014	This session was the official beginning of the project. In it, we would have the students reflect on and discuss the value of the project for their lives by means of several activities and visual aids.
Episode 3	Computer room	16.05.2014	In this session the students went to the computer room to do an activity that sought to raise awareness of the demand for employees that speaks Spanish in the local and national job market. Thus, the students mainly had to explore the available jobs, both in the UK and Coventry, were Spanish was a requirement and reflect on how their perceptions may have changed after the search.

Episode 4	Writing up begins	23.05.2014	The aim of this session was to complete the first section of the project sheet corresponding to introducing oneself. We started with some short activities, to prepare the students to write a short paragraph in the designated section of the project.
Episode 5	Writing up continues I	02.06.2014	In this session the students continued with their writing. We started the lesson with some revision of the relevant section of the project, which was about one's likes and dislikes. The students were then left to write a short paragraph about their likes and dislikes using the project handout.
Episode 6	Writing-up continues II	13.06.2014	Next, the students continued with their report. Similar to the previous session, we started with some short revision activities and then the students were encouraged to complete a section of the project sheet by using the contents of the lesson and additional tools (e.g., lists with connectors and expressions, etc.).
Episode 7	Writing-up continues III	18.06.2014	This Episode followed the same pattern as the former. The students worked on content by means of short activities and then applied what they learned to the corresponding section of the project sheet.
Episode 8	Writing up continues IV	27.06.2014	In this session the students completed the writing part of the project. They completed some activities on the topic of what they would like to do in the future and moved on to work on the relevant project section.
Episode 9	Video preparation begins	02.07.2014	This session focused on introducing the second part of the project, in which the students, in groups of three, were expected to design a creative video, to respond to the question 'How can Spanish help me succeed in my future career?'. The groups were asked to reflect on the video outline on a sheet that Pamela and I prepared with some prompts.
Episode 10	Video scripting	04.07.2014	In this session, the students continued working on the video project by developing a script that would eventually be acted out and recorded.
Episode 11	Video completion	11.07.2014	This session focused on finishing the video recording. Having planned and subsequently developed a script for the video based on the content learnt during the writing part of the project, the students set out to record their videos.
Episode 12	End of the project	17.07.2014	In the last Episode of the project the students showed their videos to me and two other teachers. Initially, I suggested inviting parents to attend the closure of the project, so as to boost the perceived meaningfulness of the project. Unfortunately, the idea was not pursued for practical reasons (e.g., time, paperwork required, etc.). After the presentations, the students provided oral feedback and assessed each other's presentations against a success criteria, which I designed, that focused on creativity and communication skills.

Having presented the characteristics of the project's twelve Episodes, Table 7.8 below shows the results of the second cycle of temporal analysis of ASEC engagement (note that the presence of a particular dimension of engagement is represented by the symbol "✓", its absence by the symbol "×", and the absence of evidence and/or inconclusive evidence is signalled by a patterned area):

Table 7.8: Results of the C2 temporal analysis of ASEC engagement

	Episode 1 Speakers **09.05.2014**	**Episode 2** Project value **14.05.2014**	**Episode 3** Computer room **16.05.2014**	**Episode 4** Writing up begins **23.05.2014**	HALF TERM HOLIDAY X 1 WEEK	**Episode 5** Writing up continues I **04.06.2014**	INTERRUPTION X 1 WEEK	**Episode 6** Writing-up continues II **13.06.2014**	**Episode 7** Writing-up continues III **18.06.2014**	INTERRUPTION X 1 WEEK	**Episode 8** Writing-up continues IV **27.06.2014**	**Episode 9** Video preparation begins **02.07.2014**	**Episode 10** Video scripting **04.07.2014**	**Episode 11** Video completion **11.07.2014**	**Episode 12** End of the project **17.07.2014**
Academic engagement	✓	✓	✓	×		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social engagement	✓	✓	✓	×		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	×	✓	✓
Emotional engagement	✓		✓	×		×		✓			✓			✓	✓
Cognitive engagement	✓	✓	✓	×		×		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

As indicated in Table 7.8, in this research cycle too the ebb and flow of student ASEC engagement with the project is evident. Assuming that the results of this analysis are valid, given that they are mostly based on two highly subjective sources of data (i.e., the research journal and reflection sheets), it appears that student engagement remained relatively positive for the first three Episodes and then dropped in Episode 4 and Episode 5, although in the latter the fall was less pronounced. It seems that that the quality of teacher-student relationships (i.e., belongingness to the teacher) in the latter Episodes may have been the most immediate reason for student disengagement. Below I present an analysis for Episode 5:

- **Episode 5 — Writing up continues (02.06.2014)**

In this session the students continued with their report writing. The lesson began with a review of the relevant section of the project, which dealt with likes and dislikes. The students were then left to write a short paragraph about their likes and dislikes using the project handout.

Unfortunately, this session bore similar results to Episode 4 and therefore, overall engagement was not accomplished at multiple levels. Analysis of the data suggests that while there seemed to be academic and social engagement, emotional and cognitive engagement was unachieved at the classroom level. From Extract 7.13 below it is possible to infer that the levels of concentration (i.e., *academic engagement*) and behaviour (i.e., *social engagement*) seemed acceptable overall, as suggested by comments such as 'so we had an okay day' and 'there was engagement'. However, it appears that there was a negative climate in the classroom (i.e., *emotional engagement*), as supported by references to Pamela's mood in the research journal — which I will not quote here because my words are too emotive and express my sense of frustration with Pamela at the time, which I now regret. And finally, it seems that the students did not

exert the mental effort required of them (i.e., *cognitive engagement*), as Extract 7.13 indicates:

Extract 7.13

So we had an okay day today. **There was engagement but it wasn't cognitive and that's why I feel this way**.

(RJ:02.06.2014)

Considering research journal data (which is not presented for the reasons specified above), it seems that, as in Episode 4, a possible contributor to student-disengagement at the emotional and cognitive levels was classroom management.

These events seemed to have come about through high levels of teacher stress, which was also evident during the first project (cf. 6.6.3). This will be further examined when I discuss the inhibitors of engagement.

Continuing with the analysis, it seems that from Episodes 6 to 12, student ASEC engagement stayed reasonably positive with an exception in Episode 10 where social engagement was not achieved overall. Again, the data pointed to the role of the teacher. The following analysis illustrates this:

- **Episode 10 — Video scripting (04.07.2014)**

In this session, the students continued working on the video. They started developing a script in their groups that would eventually be acted out and recorded. Analysis of the data suggests that, overall, in this session most of the students engaged at the academic and cognitive levels while they did not engage at the social level. The reason for this could not be identified in the data but it may possibly be related to a negative atmosphere in the classroom. Moreover, there was not sufficient evidence available to ascertain whether the majority of students engaged at an emotional level.

To illustrate, the following Extract suggests that there seemed to be general student concentration (i.e., *academic engagement*) and effort to carry out the activity (i.e., *cognitive engagement*), as implied by the comment "Most of the groups worked surprisingly well". However, academic engagement seemed to occur at the expense of social engagement (i.e., students did not behave according to classroom and school norms), as it is suggested by the reported absence of a peaceful atmosphere in the classroom:

Extract 7.14

Most of the groups worked surprisingly well. Because these **kids are very rude** (meaning that they speak when we are giving instructions or they what and why everything we do or say) and they were **calling out all the time it was very difficult to stick to the roles**. I think for the roles to work **there needs to be an atmosphere of peace**. All we can do is keep trying and remind them of the roles. Even though Pamela and I were aware of this none of us remembered it because of the intensity of this class.

(RJ:04.07.2014)

Furthermore, it seems that the lack of social engagement overall may have been related to the fact that the class did not get off to a positive start:

Extract 7.15

Today was a nice class despite its beginning was a bit rocky. **Pamela was very tired and she sent David out in minute 1**. On the other hand she didn't have neither the objectives nor the agenda open so that slowed down the class, which btw today was shorter because they have to go to mass.

(RJ: 04.07.2014)

As I concluded in the global analysis of ASEC engagement, in this Cycle, I will not be making any inferences regarding emotional engagement based on the presence or absence of other dimensions of engagement in the Episode. This is because previous analyses so far have shown that the relationships between emotional engagement and other dimensions are more complex than they appear to be and, not necessarily consistent, as often commented in the (cf. 6.6.1.2). In Episode 5, for example, we observe that, according to the data, emotional engagement was not achieved but academic and social engagement, were. This is similar to what occurred in the global analysis of ASEC engagement (i.e., emotional engagement was the only dimension that

seemed to go unachieved). This suggests that, at both the global and temporal analysis level, inferring emotional engagement from academic and social engagement would be counterproductive. Furthermore, attempting to make inferences of emotional engagement based on only one data source, (i.e., the research journal, which does not always provide an accurate representation of the events), seems equally counterproductive.

7.6.3 C2 Facilitators of Engagement

Below I provide an analysis (deductive thematic) for the ways in which meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence unfolded across the project to facilitate the results discussed in the global and temporal analyses. Similarly to the first project (cf. 6.6.2), I try to make sense of the data obtained by studying the five research instruments employed in this investigation. Also, the facilitators of engagement are analysed at the classroom level and approached holistically. Finally, with the analysis of each facilitator, I attach the instructional strategies that were employed to set the facilitator in motion in my particular context.

Meaningfulness

In order to foster meaningfulness in the first project I implemented the following research-based instructional strategies:

1. Foster students' interest by (a) infusing a novel experience (Anderman et al., 2004): that of researching the job market and learning about the benefits of speaking Spanish for one's professional career; and (b) choosing a topic that would connect with their roles as (British) citizens (Belland et al., 2013): that of reflecting and writing about one's future career and how Spanish can contribute to it.

2. Promote attainment value by (a) (regularly) explaining to students the benefits of the project, both in terms of content knowledge and skill acquisition, for their current and future lives (Brophy 2008; Jang 2008); and (b) reflecting upon the attainment value of the project (Kolodner et al., 2003; Turns et al., 2010).
3. Continually display the topic of the project to help students focus on the big picture (Clinton & van den Broek, 2012; Ertmer & Simons, 2006).
4. Display of expert performance (Brophy 1999; Powell & Mason, 2013) in the form of guest speakers to sensitise students to the perceived importance of learning languages for one's future career (see Taylor & Marsden, 2012).
5. Allow students to use technology (Kenny 2002; Lee et al., 1998) in several parts of the project, e.g., when researching the British job market using real websites or when producing the video.
6. Encourage creative expression (Starko 2013) by allowing students to produce the video in whatever way they thought would be most creative.

The data analysis reveals that, on average, the students found the project meaningful; they perceived it as valuable enough to make them want to invest the time and effort necessary to complete it.

To illustrate, Table 7.9 below shows that more than half of the students responded positively to I-statements 23 to 25, indicating that they found the project interesting or as valuable to their lives:

Table 7.9: Questionnaire results regarding meaningfulness of the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
23. This project was interesting to me	1	7	5	1
24. This project was useful for my current and future life	3	7	3	1
25. It was useful for me to have a chat with the external speakers	4	7	3	0

In addition, three out of the five groups interviewed highlighted the meaningfulness of the project based on its usefulness for their future careers. It is noteworthy that it is not that the other two groups stated the opposite, but rather that the topic simply did not come up during the interview or the topic was not developed. In the following Extract, a student relates the meaningfulness of the project to the fact that it taught him about the benefits of learning Spanish for one's future:

Extract 7.16

T01 Tom: **Me personally, I enjoyed the project because it taught me about other cultures and what Spanish can get you when you're older.**
T02 Nicolás: Like what?
T03 Tom: I want to be a lawyer. I could go to California in America and be a lawyer there, because they speak Spanish over there, don't they? In California they speak Spanish.
T04 Nicolás: Spanish, yes.
T05 Tom: Yes, quite a lot of Spanish there, yes.

(API:17.07.2014 Todd, Tom, and Desmond)

Similarly, one positive outcome of the project was that two students changed their mind and decided to take up Spanish for GCSEs as a result of their experience. For example, Todd reported in the pre-model implementation interviews that he was planning on dropping Spanish because he found it boring but he then later changed this mind:

Extract 7.17

T01 Nicolás: All right. So having said that, do you intend to continue learning Spanish in Key Stage 4?
T02 Todd: Yes, I took GCSE Spanish.
T03 Nicolás: Really?

T04 Todd: Yes.
T05 Nicolás: Why?
T06 Todd: **Just I enjoy it and I think it's going to help me in the future.**
T07 Nicolás: Really, you enjoyed this year?
T08 Todd: Yes.
T09 Nicolás: More than the previous years?
T10 Todd: **Yes, the projects were good, where we did group work, but the individual work was a bit boring, but it was good overall.**
T11 Nicolás: **All right. When I'm asking you, I'm surprised because I'm comparing here to what you said in the first interview. When I asked you the same question, you said that you thought that-**
T12 Todd: **Yes, it's got better**.
T13 Nicolás: **So you changed your mind then? And it's your decision, it's not your parents forced you or anything?**
T14 Todd: **Yes it's mine.**
T15 Nicolás: Great, thank you very much.

(API:17.07.2014 Todd, Tom, and Desmond)

Similarly, in the pre-model implementation interviews, Tom reported that Spanish was not an important subject for him and he preferred to choose something different for KS4:

Extract 7.18

T01 Nicolás: **What made you change your mind? Because you told me in the first interview that you didn't intend to study.**
T02 Tom: I like it now, I think it's helped me on [unintelligible].
T03 Nicolás: Okay, so that's-
T04 Tom: Well have you still got that?
T05 Nicolás: **Yes, basically I've got here that you told me, "No I would like to do something that would help you more than Spanish, in the future." That was your answer.**
T06 Tom: **Bloody hell. Was that at the start of the year?**
T07 Nicolás: **That was the first interview.**
T08 Tom: **Oh God.**
T09 Nicolás: **So that's why I'm asking you what changed your mind?**
T10 Tom: **I don't know, I think I realised how much it can help you.**
T11 Nicolás: That's great, thank you Tom.

(API:17.07.2014 Todd, Tom, and Desmond)

Finally, towards the end of the project Pamela and I acknowledged that most of the students started changing their attitudes towards MFL as a result of reflecting on the value of learning Spanish for their future lives. This can be inferred from the following Extract:

Extract 7.19

Pamela today said that the fact the students **are doing this project is helping them reflect on the future**, which they don't really get to do in other subjects, **she says that at the beginning most of the didn't have clear what they wanted to do [jobs] and now** (as you can tell by their writings) **they are more specific with the things they want.** And when it is not clear, they say at least the kind of work they would like to do (working with people, etc.)

(RJ:27.06.2014)

The above findings are of particular significance because they highlight the potential of promoting the career value of language learning in instruction so as to increase student uptake of MFL for KS4. It also suggests, although somewhat weakly, that my proposal of combining student engagement with raising awareness for the career value of learning language might contribute to resolving, in some way, the issue of low uptake of MFL in KS4 (cf. 2.3).

To conclude, it is important to also make reference to the homework given throughout the project in this section. I tried to design homework assignments that were as meaningful as possible to the students by (a) infusing a novel experience (Anderman et al., 2004), (b) applying the students' suggestions made during the first project (Assor et al., 2005), (c) choosing a topic that would connect with their roles as (British) citizens (Belland et al., 2013), and (d) providing choice (Palmer 2009; Patall 2013). As I discussed in 6.5, this course of action was taken because the homework in the first project was generally perceived as difficult and boring, which had a significant negative impact on student engagement. The homework, in this cycle, therefore consisted of choosing one task per week amongst a list of eight tasks. Each task differed in value and the aim was for the student to score a certain amount of points by the end of the project. The tasks were directly connected with the project topic and with the real world. Some of them sought to raise awareness about the benefits of speaking Spanish in today's world, others sought to improve Spanish language skills only, while others, sought both.

Interestingly, the data shows that most students, not only liked the homework in the second project, but they liked it better than first one. The four out of five groups of

students, who explicitly stated that the homework was of value, suggest this. This is illustrated in the Extract below:

Extract 7.20

T01 Nicolás: What about the homework?
T02 Randolph: Yes.
T03 Nicolás: Did you like it?
T04 Randolph: **It was better than the other homework** [first project homework]**.**
T05 Charlie: It was better than last time.
T06 Nicolás: Why is that?
T07 Charlie: **Because you had more freedom over what you do.**
T08 Randolph: **Yes. The tasks were more fun, like, interview someone and your own idea, which was a really nice twist and pick a song and then translate it, so you had more freedom over what you do.**

(API:17.07.2014 Charlie and Randolph)

This Extract also suggests that promoting autonomy within the homework may have helped towards increasing its perceived value (i.e., strategy (d) above)

Moreover, Pamela also shared the students' views. She confirmed that the students saw the point of doing the homework in the second project. To illustrate, in the Extract below, we observe Pamela celebrating the success of the homework:

Extract 7.21

T01 Pamela: **Yes, yes. When you interviewed them and they gave you their opinion of what the homework should be like and … and, you know, the whole structure was changed and you introduced a new system and they can pick and choose – it worked for them**. **And also because you had listened to them and, you know, they could see that – it was good.** Giving them different options and also because we marked it in the class so they could see what they were doing – it was being checked on.

(PI:14.08.2014)

This Extract also conveys that designing the homework with the students' constructive criticism at the end of project one (strategy (b) above) in mind, contributed towards increasing its perceived meaningfulness.

To conclude, my views on the homework further confirm the above. In the following Extract my satisfaction with the homework throughout the project is evident:

Extract 7.22

Overall then the **homework is being done and the kids like it**, which is quite an improvement. **They are even choosing the bits in which they have to write a little bit of Spanish** and that's great.

(RJ:27.06.2014)

Overall, the findings regarding homework suggest that the issue of the homework found in the first project was addressed in the second project and therefore, did not seem to interfere with student overall engagement. In fact, the data suggests that it may have contributed towards increasing it.

In conclusion then, it can be argued that the majority of students perceived the project of interest and value to their lives. This, in turn, indicates that the facilitator of meaningfulness was successfully deployed in this project.

Autonomy

To facilitate autonomy in this project I implemented the empirically validated strategies shown below. It is noteworthy that, as in project one, both teachers did not implement all the strategies. For example, Pamela did not prioritise strategy number one, as the data shows. Additionally, strategies number two and three were only implemented in the second part of the project where the students had to produce a video. The strategies are as follows:

1. Use informational, non-controlling language with students during the project (Jang et al., 2010; Reeve & Halusic, 2009).
2. Give students choice in different aspects of the project (Katz & Assor, 2006).
3. Welcome students' opinions and ideas into the flow of the activity (Assor et al., 2005).

Considering the data, overall it seems that most students did not feel empowered during the project, at least, during the main part of project (i.e., the writing part). The data

shows that, in this part of the project, the students did not feel that they had much voice and choice over aspects of the project and also felt that the classroom climate was controlling and authoritarian. As suggested in the global analysis of engagement, it seems that this may have had a particular impact on their emotional engagement. Furthermore, the data suggests that students felt more autonomous during the second part of the project (i.e., the video part).

The following Extract summarises the views of the majority in regard to student autonomy during the first part of the project:

Extract 7.23

T01 Nicolás: Do you feel as if you had a lot of freedom in the project? As if you had a lot of freedom in this-
T02 Tom: **No, Miss Pamela was proper strict. Well we'd sit there and she'd be like, "Do your work."**
T03 Desmond: Yes.
T04 Tom: "Do it now, do it now." Like that.
T05 Desmond: **Last lesson we had a bit more freedom, because we made the video. But all the time before when we just did the writing-**
T06 Tom: **You'd just sit there.**
T07 Desmond: **You just sit there and write.**

(API:17.07.2014 Todd, Tom, and Desmond)

As implied above, the second part of the project was perceived differently in terms of perceived student-autonomy. The data shows that most students felt that they had more freedom in this part. This is evident in comments, such as the one that follows (Extract 7.24) as well as the contents of Table 7.10, where we observe a positive reaction to the strategies to promote autonomy by about two thirds of the students:

Extract 7.24

T01 Nicolás: Is there anything else you liked about it? Anything you…?
T02 Randolph: **We had quite a bit of freedom to make our own video**.
T03 Charlie: Yes.

(API:17.07.2014 Charlie and Randolph)

Table 7.10: Questionnaire results regarding perceived autonomy in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
33. I felt I had freedom to make choices and decisions about how to make my video	1	8	4	1
34. I liked to take part in the assessment of my peers	1	9	4	0

It is worth mentioning that, in the second project, the element of autonomy was reinterpreted so as to get Pamela more involved in the project. Given that Pamela felt more comfortable with a non-autonomous, supportive environment, for this particular group, we agreed to limit autonomy for the second part of the second project. In so doing, it seems that, we may have hindered the (emotional) engagement of the students (cf. 7.6.1). Below are some interview excerpts that clarify Pamela's position with regard to student autonomy in relation to our specific group:

Extract 7.25

T01 Pamela: I **don't think they're ready to negotiate. I don't think they are mature enough.**
[…]
T02 Pamela: **At least with this group, I think. No with all the groups because some groups are more mature and more-** but because they were not a group, you know, they moved together this year and they were more interested in messing around not only in languages, but in all the lessons. I don't think they were taking seriously the negotiation – **they were thinking more about how can we have a good time in lessons so I'm not sure they were taking seriously the project or the learning so I didn't think the negotiation was as I think with this group** – as a whole group. Some of them were more mature than others
T03 Nicolás: Alright.
T04 Pamela: **I think negotiating the objectives of the project was fantastic and it would have worked with other the groups**.
[…]
T05 Nicolás: OK. Do you know students should be autonomous, because, they…
T06 Pamela: **I don't think they are.**
T07 Nicolás: You don't think they are?
T08 Pamela: No.
[…]
T09 Nicolás: **You said once that I think you don't think the students nowadays are autonomous, right – the opposite effect – they are spoon-fed**…
T10 Pamela **Yes**.

(PI:14.08.2014)

The data analysed shows a dichotomy between the students who, on the one hand, seem to desire more freedom and, on the other, their teacher who does not sense they are

really ready for this. This seems to have a negative impact on student engagement, especially at the emotional level. This issue suggests that the provision of autonomy is a very delicate matter (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Its support may sometimes depend on sacrifices on the part of both the students and the teacher. At times, due to the students' disposition, autonomy needs to be limited and at other times teachers need to become more supportive of student-autonomy (see Reeve & Halusic, 2009, for a discussion). Unfortunately, in this investigation, it seems that a compromise could not be arrived at. This would suggest that overall this facilitator of engagement was not successfully promoted, which seemed to affect emotional engagement in particular.

Belongingness (to peers)

Below are the instructional strategies that were deployed to promote positive relationships amongst peers. It is important to highlight that these strategies only apply to the second part of the project (i.e., the video development) because the first part of the project mainly concentrated on individual writing. The strategies are as follows:

1. Provision of shared goals: drafting the script of a video collaboratively and subsequently recording a video in which they act out the script (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Tomasello et al., 2005).
2. Provision of social goals such as having responsibilities within the group (social responsibility goals) (Rodkin et al., 2013).

The analysis of the data suggests that overall students did not fulfil their need for belongingness during the majority of the project. This seems largely due to the fact that the students worked individually for 9 out of the 12 Episodes, and, therefore, they did not have opportunities to establish connections with their peers. For example, in the post-project interviews four out of the five groups criticised the first part of the project for its lack of group work. The following Extract illustrates the students' views:

Extract 7.26

T01	Nicolás: Okay, cool. What went well about this project? What do you like the most about this project?
T02	Steve: **The group work.**
T03	Nicolás: The group work?
T04	Steve: Yes.
T05	Nicolás: Why?
T06	Steve: **Because you're not just doing everything on your own then. You're getting different opinions from different people instead of just doing everything individually because in life you don't do stuff individually. If you're working for companies and that, you don't just work on your own.**
T07	Nicolás: Alright. What about you, Hugo?
T08	Hugo: The same thing as what Steve said.

(API:17.07.2014 Steve and Hugo)

The previous Extract also conveys a message shared by most students in the interviews, i.e., that the individual work was perceived as displeasing. This is also implied by the students' responses to the questionnaire where they the majority seemed to support collaborative work:

Table 7.11: Questionnaire results regarding perceived belongingness (to peers) in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
28. I enjoyed my experience working in a group	4	8	2	0
29. I like the way the groups were put together	3	6	3	2

The above findings seem to suggest that the weak support of belongingness in this project may have taken a toll on student emotional engagement (cf. 7.6.1). It could be argued that tailoring the project design (including more individual work) to encourage Pamela's involvement in the project (cf. 6.5) (i.e., belongingness to peers) may have had its downside. The following illustrates Pamela's disposition towards group work with this particular group of students:

Extract 7.27

T01 Nicolás: **OK. Because you're not a big fan of collaboration, are you?**
T02 Pamela: **No because I think they mess around.**
T03 Nicolás: Ha ha – that's very honest, thank you.
T04 Pamela: **Sorry but it's true that, umm…, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know what I think – I just think they mess around too much. But it's true that collaboration is the key because you need to collaborate in everything you do.**
[…]
T06 Pamela: **But it also shows I'm willing to change and I know what it is there. Of course I sometimes take the easy options because I don't have the time or the energy**. You know, you need to deal with misbehaviour every lesson because the problem that they seem to is that they are not learning – even if it's not misbehaviour – even if it's not they're learning fast enough – all of that – I don't have the time or the energy sometimes. For example, with the GCSE groups, we have some, you know, collaboration in working things and it works really well and I'm happy to do it.

(PI:14.08.2014)

It may thus be concluded that the facilitator of belongingness (to peers) was not efficiently deployed in the project, and that may have affected student emotional engagement, as mentioned earlier (cf. 7.6.1). It appears in this case that group-work time was considerably reduced to minimise the challenges posed by this particular group of students. This finding, similar to the findings concerning autonomy, suggests that in order to promote ASEC engagement in learning activities, teachers may sometimes need to go beyond their traditional methods in order to better meet students' needs (i.e., belongingness to peers), otherwise they might put student engagement at risk (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Reeve 2012). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Pamela did step outside her comfort zone by including some pair work in the first part of the project where the students had to write, thereby showing her willingness to embrace group work (see Extract 7.27). Nevertheless, overall it seems that this was perceived as not being enough to fully meet the students' need for belongingness (to peers), as the students' comments above illustrate.

Belongingness (to the teacher)

To promote healthy teacher-student relationships during the second project, the following instructional strategies were implemented. As in the first project, it is

important to mention that, as the data will show, it was not always possible for Pamela to prioritise these strategies, with particular reference to strategies number one and two:

1. Developing caring relationships between the teacher and the students (Noddings 1988; Wentzel 1997).
2. Holding positive attitudes and enthusiasm during the project (Turner et al., 2002).
3. Treating students equally without favouritism or discrimination (Peter & Dalbert, 2010).

The data shows similar results to the ones found for peer connections, discussed in the previous section. It seems that the majority of students did not feel emotionally connected to the teachers, which seemed to have impacted on their overall engagement with the project.

To illustrate, the contents of the following Table suggest that most students perceived that teacher attitude was not always positive during the project (I-statement 22). This finding, although it does not make explicit reference to any one specific teacher, suggests that belongingness (i.e., teacher-student relationships) may have not been accomplished in this project.

Table 7.12: Questionnaire results regarding teacher-student relationships

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
22. My teachers have had a positive attitude throughout the project	0	5	8	1

From the qualitative data, it was clear that teacher strictness in particular was perceived by students to create a negative atmosphere in the classroom that seemed to lead to disengagement. Consider the following Extract:

Extract 7.28

T01 Nicolás: If I had to do this project again with another year 9, what would you recommend?
T02 Todd: **Yes and do it with a less strict teacher.**
T03 Nicolás: With a less strict teacher?
T04 Desmond: Yes. Get Mr [another Spanish teacher] or something.
T05 Tom: **The kids will enjoy it more**. Sir I think you're quite a good teacher, [quite nice having you round], because you make the lessons flow nicely. **Miss Pamela makes it quite harsh and quite hard to work, because she was shouting, "Ning, ning, ning."**
T06 Todd: **Yes and that makes everyone annoyed, which makes them behave badly.**
T07 Tom: Yes. But when you're there it's pretty cool, because you can talk to the class without shouting at them. **Miss Pamela, she can't talk, she just shouts.**
T08 Todd: **Yes, at the entire class.**

(API:17.07.2014 Todd, Tom, and Desmond)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that two students implied that one of the reasons why they would not continue studying Spanish in KS4 was partly because of their relationship with the teacher.

This finding would suggest that the nature of the teacher-student relationship may go beyond student engagement, becoming a potential reason why students would dislike a subject and in turn, stop studying it. This would be consistent with findings reported in research on the effects of teacher-student relationships on social and academic outcomes of adolescents (e.g., Alexander et al., 1997; Cataldi & Kewal-Ramani, 2009; Midgley et al., 1989) and more specifically, in line with research that has found that belongingness to the teacher is a powerful antecedent of students' attitudes towards foreign language learning (e.g., Clark & Trafford, 1995; Nikolov 1998; Philips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993; Wright 1999). However, this finding would call into question the results of Bartram's (2010) study that suggests that sociocultural issues (i.e., beliefs of language utility) outweigh the motivational and attitudinal impact of the classroom environment. The two students mentioned above decided to discontinue their study of language despite showing a marked increase in their awareness of the utility of MFL. In light of this, the preceding finding makes a case for paying special attention to fostering belongingness in the classroom, especially regarding teacher-student relationships, if we are to attempt to increase student uptake of MFL.

As will be discussed later, the lack of positive teacher-student relationships may be partly related to stress and difficult students. Thus, even though the decision to limit student autonomy and group work in the second project helped to keep it more within Pamela's comfort zone as a teacher, teacher-student relations were still subject to various ups and downs in response to events inside and outside the classroom. Nevertheless, there was a perception among at least one group of students that Pamela seemed happier in the second project:

Extract 7.29

T01 Nicolás: Her attitude?
T02 Daniel: Yes, her attitude was better in the first one than in the second one. No it wasn't actually, sorry, **no it was better in the second one, better in the second one**. I think she's getting fed up of us.

(API:17.07.2014 Rachel, Daniel, and Bob)

Moreover, it is important to note that Pamela's disposition was certainly not always negative. In fact, when she displayed a positive attitude, this seemed to have a positive impact on student engagement overall, as suggested by the following Extracts:

Extract 7.30

Pamela was outstanding too at all times..

(RJ:27.06.2014)

Extract 7.31

Pamela was outstanding today. Very patient and I know it took her a lot. **But she did it and hence the results of the class.** She seems quite happy with the results and that's very important to me. I'm glad that this is leading to a happy ending.

(RJ:11.07.2014)

In conclusion, from the data we can infer that the teacher-student relationship (i.e., belongingness to the teacher), in general, had positive periods but these were not always sustained through the project, consequently affecting student engagement.

Competence

To develop a perceived sense of competence in students during the project, I implemented the following three instructional strategies based on research:

1. Provision of specific, proximal, and attainable goals (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).
2. Promotion of mastery orientations by making the project criterion-referenced (Fast et al., 2010).
3. Provision of process goal feedback (i.e., feedback that informs individuals about how to attain their goals) (Schunk & Swartz, 1993) and attributional feedback (i.e., attributing success to effort, persistence, and correct strategy use rather than intelligence or ability) (Dresel & Haugwitz, 2008) both verbally and in written format throughout the project.

Considering the data, it seems that, in general, students found this project within their level of competence. Additionally, the data also suggests that perceived ability to do well was associated with subsequent gains in learning.

To illustrate, Table 7.13 below suggests that the project was generally perceived as manageable. For example, I-statements 26 and 27 suggest that the majority of students found the project within their level of competence:

Table 7.13: Questionnaire results regarding perceived competence in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
26. I found this project easy	3	6	4	1
27. This project was just right for my level of Spanish	2	9	2	1

This pattern seems to also be present in the post-project interviews where all five groups reported that the project was not difficult. The following Extract illustrates this:

Extract 7.32

T01 Nicolás: Do you find it [the project] difficult?
T02 Sharon: **I didn't find it difficult, no.**
T03 Nicolás: You Helen?
T04 Helen: **No**.
T05 Nicolás: You David?
T06 David: **No**.
T07 Nicolás: Because in the first project, I think that you said that it was a bit difficult?
T08 Sharon: **Yes because we had to do something completely that we didn't know, like write a full on story in Spanish, to Mexican people. We had no knowledge of what words we were using. But this time we did words that we know.**

(API:17.07.2014 Sharon, David, and Helen)

Pamela concurs with the students. In the post-project interview she pointed out that it was a good idea to lower our expectations and design a project more fitting to the students' current level rather than to the level they were 'supposed to be' at:

Extract 7.33

T01 Nicolás: So they just didn't sit back?
T02 Pamela: No, no, no. At the beginning they wanted to sit back but no, they were engaged. **The activities, the way they were organized was good, you know. That was great from you because you said we really need to go back to the basics but I was a bit like – dah! – they know that they should know but from very basic they went to quite a good level**.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Interestingly, this finding, although seemingly minor, may have implications for teaching and learning, since it would be consistent with prior research that has demonstrated that environments that stress content coverage over mastery have detrimental effects on learning and understanding (see Schwartz et al., 2009, for a discussion).

Moreover, both Pamela (see Extract 7.34, for an example) and the majority of students (see Extract 7.35, for an example) also highlighted that the structure of the project, bite-sized and progressive, as well as the clear goals provided in project helped keep all the students on target. This finding suggests that strategy number one (i.e., provision of

specific, proximal, and attainable goals) was efficiently implemented in the second project, in contrast to what occurred in project one (cf. 6.6.2).

Extract 7.34

T01 Pamela: I think the way we organized the project – **it was very well organized**.
T02 Nicolás: So you say organized, in what way?
T03 Pamela: **The structure was good starting from easy to difficult and giving them a focus to the end, being very clear in what different stages were and connecting all the stages and giving them the chance to put into practice what they were learning, showing themselves what they can do it**.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Extract 7.35

T01 Randolph: **I liked how we went through the sheet step by step, it was pretty – it helped a lot.**
T02 Nicolás: So you liked the-
T03 Charlie: The technology aspect of it.
T04 Nicolás: Do you also agree with him, in **having a sheet telling you what to do**?
T05 Charlie: **Yes**.
T06 Randolph: **Yes**.
T07 Nicolás: **What about the checklist, did you find it useful?**
T08 Randolph: **Yes, yes, it was like a success criteria, we used it pretty well.**

(API:17.07.2014 Charlie and Randolph)

It is noteworthy that in the data both students and teachers alluded to learning as a result of perceived student-competence. Moreover, the data also suggests that in the second project students seemed to learn more than in the first. Beginning with learning Spanish, the following Table shows a clear majority responded positively to I-statement 1:

Table 7.14: Questionnaire results regarding learning in the project

	A lot	Some	A little	Not at all
1. This is how much Spanish I have learnt in this project	0	13	0	1

Pamela's post-project interview data supports this finding as well. For example, in the Extract that follows, we observe her overall satisfaction with the project in terms of language learning:

Extract 7.36

T01 Nicolás: What about the, umm…, actual Spanish learning? Were they also or engaged in that sense?
T02 Pamela: **Oh yes. You could see a difference. They were stronger – their sentences were stronger but not only that, umm…, the way they approached the learning was fantastic – was proper learning happening in the classroom**.
T03 Nicolás: Really?
T04 Pamela: Well, even Hugo, you know, was trying – he was creating good things. They saw the structure – they, they knew how to move on – yeah. And you know, like, they were speaking, they were like, happy to talk.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Similarly, I also perceived that the majority of students were learning. In fact, it seemed that they were learning more than in the first project. This can be appreciated in the following reflection, which was done towards the end of the first part of the project:

Extract 7.37

I must say that **she's [Pamela] is really happy and impressed with the levels. The kids are simply amazing (compared to what they were), they are interested, and it seems that most of them want to improve their sentences.** They continuously ask me if what they are writing is good, ask me for linkers and so on. **I didn't see this this much in P1**, and actually in the whole course.

(RJ:27.06.2014)

The above findings would thus suggest then that overall learning occurred in this project.

Considering now the relationship between perceived competence and learning, the following Extract, which represents the views of four out of the five groups interviewed, illustrates not only the competence-learning relationship but also that this relationship seemed to be stronger than in project one:

Extract 7.38

T01	Nicolás: Okay, so based on that, regarding that, do you think you learnt a lot of Spanish in this project?
T02	Rachel: **Yes**.
T03	Daniel: **Do I think I've learnt Spanish? Yes, obviously**.
T04	Interviewer: Do you think you learnt more Spanish in this project than the other one?
T05	Daniel: **Yes**.
T06	Bob: **Yes**.
T07	Nicolás: Do you know the reason why? What makes you think that?
T08	Daniel: Because we're doing a project. We're writing in Spanish as well. Our characteristics and our future, what we want to in the future.
T09	Rachel: **Well obviously we have got somewhere, because at the start Miss was getting angry because we kept asking you questions, like how to write stuff. Now at the end, we didn't hardly ever do that, so we obviously have learnt stuff.**
T10	Daniel: **Yes we didn't know how to write stories, so she got a bit fed up, but this one's a bit different, so. It isn't hard.**

(API:17.07.2014 Rachel, Daniel, and Bob)

This is further supported by Pamela's views on the matter. The following Extract illustrates a connection between competence and subsequent learning, which it is claimed to be stronger than in project one:

Extract 7.39

T01	Nicolás: Yes – that's true, that's true, at the very end - ha ha. OK, so now having said this, do you think they learnt more on this project than in the first one?
T02	Pamela: **Yes, yes. I'm not sure how much they learnt in the first project and it's not because they didn't learn, it's because, umm… I think the – I don't know how to explain it, umm… they learnt, but they were not aware of it and because most of them couldn't write they had the feeling of not learning anything.**
T03	Nicolás: So it was more a problem of confidence?
T04	Pamela: Yes.
T05	Nicolás: **So do you think they were more confident…**
T06	Pamela: **In the second one? Yes, definitely. They learnt more, they were more confident, yes. And they were happy and proud of themselves**.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Overall, we may conclude from the data analysis that the facilitator of competence was successfully promoted throughout the project. This suggests that lowering my expectations of the students in terms of their competence for the second project was an appropriate course of action because it gave rise to a project, which was better suited to the students' academic knowledge and abilities, thus making life a lot easier for the teacher. This conclusion would also suggest that the issue of inaccurately estimating the students' level of competence, which occurred during the first project, may have been overcome in this project (cf. 6.6.3).

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the analysis of the facilitators of engagement suggests that only two of the four facilitators were successfully deployed during the project. It seems that students perceived the project as meaningful to their lives and within their level of expertise but they did not feel autonomous or related to their peers and Pamela.

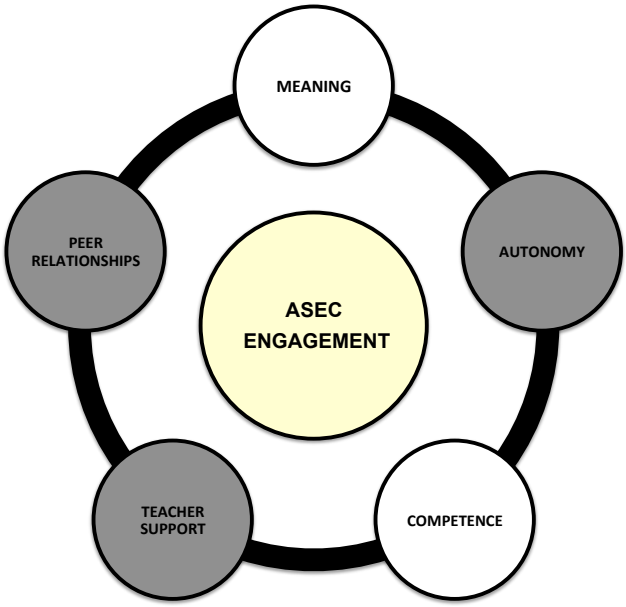

Figure 7.1: Elements of the ProE model not supported in Cycle Two (greyed out)

As already mentioned, these findings suggest, firstly, that modifying the project to suit Pamela's teaching style so as to encourage greater collaboration between us did not have the expected result. Even though student autonomy and group work were lessened this time to keep things within her comfort zone, she tended to remain fairly strict in her relations with the students. This suggests that factors other than the project itself were at play. As I discuss in the following section, it is possible that stress was the most probable factor. Secondly, the findings also highlight that for student engagement to be fully achieved, teachers may need to go beyond their teaching preferences to meet students' needs (Fredricks 2014), especially with regard to supporting greater autonomy and belongingness to teachers. Finally, this analysis also lends support to my argument

that deployment of all the elements of the ProE model is key in the achievement of full engagement. This interpretation is based on the observation that (a) the absence of some of them (i.e., autonomy and belongingness to both peers and teacher) seem to have had a negative impact on overall student engagement and (b) their presence achieved the opposite effect.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to state that, as we learnt from the first project (cf. 6.6.2), we should not conclude that the implementation of a facilitator was either achieved or unachieved. Rather, it is important to understand the above results as evidence that the elements of the ProE model were supported more or less successfully. One reason is that this analysis looks into the facilitators in a global manner or at the classroom level. Therefore, this type of analysis may mask whether the so-called not supported facilitators may have actually been successfully deployed at some point during the project (e.g., belongingness to the teacher). Based on this, we can conclude that, generally speaking, student perceived meaningfulness and competence were supported for the majority of the project whereas the opposite occurred for feelings of autonomy and belongingness to both peers and teacher.

7.6.4 C2 Inhibitors of Engagement

Having explored how the elements of the ProE model were deployed during the project, now I will consider the specific contextual factors that may have impeded student engagement, and thus interfered with the implementation of the ProE model. These are:

a) Creativity
b) Difficult students
c) Interruptions
d) Double periods
e) Teacher stress

Similar to Cycle One, this is an (inductive thematic) analysis that explores context-specific factors holistically rather than across time, in retrospection, drawing on five different data sources. The reasons for this were explained in the previous research cycle (cf. 6.6.3)

Creativity

Interestingly, analysis of the data suggests that the majority of students did not feel as if they could have been as creative as they would have liked. This seems to have impacted on how they engaged throughout the project. However, this seems to be especially relevant to the first part of the project in which the students did not have to be very creative. For example, considering the following Extract, which represents the views of three out the five groups. Here, we observe a group of students expressing disappointment with the lack of opportunities for creativity in the first part of the project:

Extract 7.40

T01 Nicolás: You enjoyed the writing part?
T02 Hugo: **No. I hated the writing part.**
T03 Steve: **You liked the recording part?**
T04 Hugo: **Yes**.
T05 Nicolás: You liked the recording part?
T06 Hugo: Yes.
T07 Nicolás: **Why was that?**
T08 Hugo: Because it was better.
T09 Steve: **It's creative.**
T10 Nicolás: It's creative?
T11 Hugo: Yes.
T12 Nicolás: Okay. What did you dislike about the project?
T13 Steve: **That we didn't use the computers**.
T14 Hugo: Yes.
T15 Nicolás: Okay. What would you have used the computers for?
T16 Hugo: **To edit our recording.**
T17 Steve: **To edit it, like [unintelligible] or whatever or we could use anything to help with research because instead of doing – say if we were doing revision, instead of writing it down, you could it on the computers and set up games and that.**
T18 Nicolás: Okay.
T19 Hugo: It's better.

(API:17.07.2014 Steve and Hugo)

As in other instances, it is noteworthy that a discussion on creativity was not prompted in the post-project interviews; rather it emerged. The above finding should therefore be considered of importance despite the fact that not all groups raised the issue.

Some authors have identified the need for creative expression as a developmental need for adolescents (see Scales 1991, for a discussion). On this basis, it is logical to assume that the students' engagement may have been affected by the lack of opportunities in the project to create something tangible. As a matter of fact, it is worth mentioning that creative expression was a strong candidate for the ProE model up until its last version. However, because of trying to be as practical as possible I ended up choosing elements with the strongest empirical support for student ASEC engagement, in which meaningfulness overcame creativity.

Moreover, I believe that this finding, along with the fact that the students did not raise this issue during the first project (likely because it did cater to this particular need), justifies the need to revise the ProE model for future implementations. It could be that creativity needs to be re-established in the model as a core element because of its potential for ASEC engagement. Furthermore, as the temporal analysis of ASEC engagement shows, the students seemed to engage at four levels several times during the first part of the project despite the lack of opportunities to express their creativity. This could suggest that creativity is not completely essential to achieving ASEC engagement. Nevertheless, it does seem important to this particular group of students, especially at the emotional level. This would be reason enough to prompt a revision of the place that creativity occupies within the ProE model (i.e., currently subsumed to meaningfulness).

Difficult students

Along with creativity, the issue of difficult students (i.e., uninvolved, apathetic, etc.) was also present in the second project although it seems to a lesser extent. This seems

somewhat obvious given that the students' difficult disposition is unlikely to change overnight. Furthermore, it could also be argued that, as I did not identify this in the asystematic analysis (i.e., practitioner account) in Cycle One as a key issue (cf. 6.5), no action plan was set in place to address this issue, hence a possible cause for its reappearance.

The data suggests that the seemingly inherent negative motivations and attitudes towards learning may have had some impact on overall student engagement during the project. This is something that was already highlighted in Section 7.6.1 when discussing social engagement. To illustrate, the following Extract summarises the views of four out of the five groups interviewed regarding the effects of the so-called difficult students on engagement:

Extract 7.41

T01	Nicolás: If this is a bad class, what do you think makes this class especially bad?
T02	Sawyer: **It makes it unworkable. You can't work if it's a bad class.**
T03	Kate: Yes, I go to Spanish and I can't be bothered because it just takes –
T04	Sawyer: **It's just a waste of an hour.**
T05	Kate: It just feels like it – I have some really good classes and they go really quickly because I really enjoy them and then with Spanish –
T06	Sawyer: It just drags.
T07	Kate: **The class just annoys me all the time.**
T08	Nicolás: What is it? Is it the atmosphere?
T09	Sawyer: It's everything.
T10	Kate: **It's the people, they just never listen**. **They just think, "Oh yes, let's just say that comment, that will just get us sent out," and then another 10 people get sent out. Sawyer: They think it's an hour of just chilled mess about and have a laugh but it's not because then it just makes it hard for everyone else to work. I can't –**
T11	Kate: **I think what they did is they just put all the really destructive people in one class and then they've just chosen a few people who actually choose to listen in that, just to make them [unintelligible] basically**.
T12	Kate: **They basically just put all of them in one class.**

(API:17.07.2014 Kate, Sawyer and Claire)

Similarly, as in Cycle One, in the data we also observe a close link between the difficult classroom atmosphere and Pamela's relationships with the students (i.e., belongingness to the teacher). The data suggests that one of the possible reasons why Pamela did not connect with the students emotionally during this project may be related to the fact that their difficult nature negatively affected her mood. In turn, this would make Pamela less

inclined to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom that would support positive teacher-student relationships. As discussed earlier (cf. 7.6.3), research supports this finding. The following Extract, which reveals the views of the majority of students, illustrates this point:

Extract 7.42

T01 Nicolás: Do you think our class is a naughty class?
T02 Rachel: No.
T03 Daniel: It's alright now actually.
T04 Nicolás: Compared to others?
T05 Rachel: Not really.
T06 Daniel: Yes I think it's naughty compared to others actually.
T07 Rachel: No but it's not, it's just like, normal.
T08 Daniel: It's not normal.
T09 Rachel: Yes I know, but if you look at all the other lessons that we have, like history- you're not in my history class, but we've got most of the people in our Spanish class. It's worse, it's sort of the same. So I wouldn't really say it's...
[…]
T10 Rachel: **Yes I know, but it's just because people do it because it annoys Miss and then when it annoys Miss-**
T11 Daniel: **She gets angry.**
T12 Rachel: **She gets angry and I think that's what makes it worse.**

(API:17.07.2014 Rachel, Daniel, and Bob)

Furthermore, the data also suggests that disruptive behaviour may also have impacted on Pamela's mood by making her lose her focus on the lesson, resulting in anxiety, and subsequently, a negative attitude. The Extract that follows alludes to this:

Extract 7.43

So I got there and Pamela was doing the reading activity she had prepared to introduce the exemplar. She had removed Walt and Sawyer already, and by the end of the class she sent out John and Daniel. **She was very nervous and very anxious and when she is like that it is normal that she loses focus. Hence, she forgot to implement the activities in the right order and the kids were a bit confused with the tasks we have prepared for today**.

(RJ:23.05.2014)

Moreover, as mentioned before, even though the issue of difficult students persisted in this project it seems that it did so to a lesser extent. The cause for this seems partly related to the fact that two disruptive students were permanently removed from the classroom. Pamela herself noted:

Extract 7.44

T01 **Pamela: So we cannot forget that we had to remove our two problems – two students were very disruptive. And also one of, not only disruptive, he was, the motivation was so low that the rest was following him. So once they were removed – but this was not the only reason**, OK, it is the project, the project, and b) work together – yeah. Their behaviour in general.
T02 Nicolás: When you say that removing these students affected your whole approach to the project?
T03 Pamela: **No I don't think so. I think, umm…, it made my life easier because there were no disruptions there all the time but also at least how I see it when these students were not there, even before they were removed, the whole class worked better, the whole atmosphere lifted** and I don't think it was only related to me.
T04 Nicolás: **OK. So they were a bad influence for the rest, right?**
T05 Pamela: **Yes, for the rest.**
T06 Nicolás: That's interesting. **So, you say that the project overall the behaviour was better?**
T07 Pamela: **Yes.**
T08 Nicolás: **Better than the first one?**
T09 Pamela: **It was better than the first one.** The second project worked better. And I think they… it worked fairly well, yeah.

(PI:14.08.2014)

This is also expressed in the following comment:

Extract 7.45

You can tell that having Walt and John out to the class makes a difference to Pamela (and to me). The atmosphere was completely different.

(RJ:18.06.2014)

Interruptions

Considering the next inhibitor of engagement, it seems that the second project also faced several types of interruptions that may have dampened student-engagement. In this project, the interruptions were mostly related to school duties such as invigilating or conducting GCSE exams, which required Pamela's presence. This suggests that making the second project shorter did not necessarily address the problem of students switching off from the project due to these regular interruptions. It could therefore be argued that perhaps PBL was not the most suitable approach to be taken in this particular context because of its longevity.

Furthermore, there was no evidence in the data that Pamela reverted to traditional teaching practices during Ofsted visits during the second project (cf. 6.6.3). This would suggest that Pamela possibly enjoyed this project more than the first. This is in fact

something that she explicitly reported, and that might be linked to that fact that (a) coming out of the first project, the project was designed more in line with her teaching preferences for this particular group of students (cf. 6.5) — and (b) disruptive students were removed. The following Extract illustrates her satisfaction with the project:

Extract 7.46

T01 Nicolás: When you say you, your mind has changed over this year from the first and second project.

T02 Pamela: **Yes – for me the second, umm…, it was better. Not just that the project was better, it was better for that group.** I think the first project was too ambitious for the group we had – it was a lovely project, it amazed me and I would like to do it with a different one.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Double periods

The issue of double periods also emerged in the second project, as might be expected. This may possibly be related to the fact that I did not identify this as a key inhibitor of student engagement in the asystematic analysis in Cycle One (cf. 6.6.3) and therefore, I did not implement a strategy to resolve this issue (e.g., structuring the lessons in a more entertaining way).

Teacher stress

Finally, as in the first project, the pressures exerted by the school on Pamela also seemed to have indirectly impacted on overall student-engagement in the second project. As suggested earlier (cf. 7.6.3), the stress that Pamela was experiencing while the project was taking place may have been a factor in her relations with at least some of the students (i.e., belongingness to the teacher), possibly manifesting itself in (a) a negative mood resulting from stress and (b) impact on lesson management because of diminished communication between us.

This is an interesting finding because the data available in the first project only associated Pamela's stress with a decrease in the communication between us. However,

This is an interesting finding because the data available in the first project only associated Pamela's stress with a decrease in the communication between us. However, the data from the second project suggests that her stress also potentially affected teacher-student relationships.

To understand how Pamela's stress may have affected general student engagement, the Extract below provides a comprehensive picture of the types of pressures that Pamela faced at the school, especially during the second project:

Extract 7.47

T01 Pamela: Yes, I've been in the school for seven years – it's not only my school it's the whole system, the teaching. **The amount of admin. tasks we need to do now is much bigger** – we need to, ahem., everything has become like a recording system and everything that happens have to be recorded. **For example, if he misbehaves in the classroom we need to record it in the system but also email tutors, email head of houses so all of that is time. Calling parents, writing letters, we are asked about many, many data. All the time it is a lot of admin tasks and this is time you don't have to just plan your lessons or just marking. So its just pressure on you because the marking and the planning of lessons have to be done anyway. And if you have extra work your days are very long and the pressure is there with the stress – it's very hard.**

T02 Nicolás: So would you say it affects you?

T03 Pamela: **Oh yes – it affects all of us. The teachers are more tired and you are not that focused on the students because you're tired**

T04 Nicolás: Right. Interesting. And another thing you mentioned in relation to this is the fact that you may get some … they may reduce the salary if you don't reach certain targets. You said something about that.

T05 Pamela: Yeah, it's umm … umm…this year the performance management in the school has changed so in the past so in a location for us every year the six and seven first years every year you get a higher salary – you move up in the scale, the pay scale. **Then you have what is called threshold – you pass the first one and after two years you pass the second one so your salary is going up and up and up. At the beginning of the year you set some targets and then you check at the end of the year and if you achieve your targets your salary goes up. But now these targets are very difficult because they are connected to the results.**

[…]

T06 Pamela: To the students' results. And in our case in our school the expected progress of the students – what they expect them to achieve – is very, very high. **And I think we are responsible for their achievement but there is a limit of what we can do. For example, the GCSE results are in two years time and I couldn't sleep yesterday already because, you know, depending on how they perform that will going to be my base for next year. That's ridiculous because I think I've tried my best but if they don't study I contact the parents, I write letters, I do everything I'm supposed to do but if they don't want to study – it's up to them**. But also because they're not responsible anymore. I can also see in the kids they are not studying – they have this position that it's not up to me it's up to you – you're not a good teacher and actually it's not the truth – if you're not going to study the results are no good. If you leave it to the last minute it's not going to work. They don't seem to have responsibility.

T07 Nicolás: Do they know this?

T08 Pamela: Yes, they know it perfectly. I can say it about their behaviour in the last seven years. They don't think it's their responsibility.

T09 Nicolás: What about the parents?

T10 Pamela: Some parents say they are understanding and some parents don't. Some parents know their kids should be doing more and some parents blame you. But the best way with parents is to keep them informed and be fair with the parents and be honest.

T11 Nicolás: Wow - so you say I suppose there is added pressure to **…**

T12 **Pamela: Imagine for GCSE I have nearly fifty students and I've made an awful lot of phone calls. All of this is our time. You need to keep the parents involved but that's time. You**

know you call them and then you call them to say it's gradually improved – you know, to keep them informed. You call them to say that they have done well in the exams. But we're talking about fifty students only in one year.

(PI:14.08.2014)

Nevertheless, it seems that the pressures confronting Pamela in the second project were slightly alleviated (see Extract 7.48 below, for an illustration). This would explain why her attitudes towards project work and the quality of her relationships with students (i.e., belongingness to the teacher) may have also improved a little during the second project.

Extract 7.48

T01 Pamela: **I think so and also this year has been horrible – the pressure on me has been huge and I could feel it in my teaching. I think I was involved but at times – it's not that I didn't want to – it's that I didn't physically or mentally – I didn't have the time to do it.**
T02 Nicolás: OK.
T03 Pamela: Because, you know, it's just a nightmare.
T04 Nicolás: Yeah.
T05 Pamela: **And, I think even I, you know, the last couple of months once the GCSE was finished and, you know, big pressure came off for me it was better – I had time to think, time to, you know, look at what we were doing and thinking if it made sense, you know. Even in lessons I could think oh well, let's connect this with the project…**

(PI:14.08.2014)

Finally, having to focus on other school commitments would reduce the amount of communication between us, affecting our coordination in the lessons, which would cause Pamela to feel stressed, and consequently negatively impact on the students. These feelings of anxiety affected her attitude in the classroom. The following Extracts illustrate this:

Extract 7.49

Pamela was a bit anxious because she hadn't prepared the objectives for the class, etc. She also was a bit lost with the project because she had not checked the slides.

(RJ:14.05.2014)

Extract 7.50

It truly made a difference that I explained to her what the objectives were and we spend a bit of time going through the activity. It really makes a difference when we communicate. In the past project it was pretty much about me telling her what to do and she on the other side, not seeing the point of anything.

(RJ:16.05.2014)

Concluding remarks

This analysis has identified the inhibitors of engagement present in the second project. As observed in the analysis, it seems that the fact that most students did not perceive the project as very creative may have hindered their engagement. This may be due to the understanding that creative expression is regarded as a developmental need of adolescents (Scales 1991). Therefore, failing to meet this need is likely to produce harmful effects on student engagement. Additionally, the disposition of the majority of students towards learning also seemed to have had an impact on the overall levels of engagement in the classroom. This is an issue that previously appeared in project one (cf. 6.6.3) and therefore it was expected to re-emerge since there was little time from one project to another to change mind-sets; and, because this inhibitor was not identified in the asystematic analysis of that cycle (i.e., practitioner account) an action plan was not set to mitigate this. Nevertheless, it seems that there was a slightly positive change in this respect during the second project. The size of the issue was reduced and in turn, it seems that general student-engagement was positively affected by it. As the data indicated, the permanent removal of a few disruptive students from the class, who encouraged general misbehaviour, which ultimately affected student-engagement, may have brought about this positive change.

Furthermore, the issues of interruptions and lengthy class periods also seemed to impact on student-engagement. Again, this was expected, since, regarding interruptions, the source of the problem is partially linked to the school's administration and therefore beyond the teacher's control. Regardless, it is noteworthy that when the interruptions were eliminated it seems that Pamela enjoyed the experience more. Regarding the double periods this inhibitor was not identified in the asystematic analysis in the first cycle. Therefore, no course of action was taken to overcome this. Finally, Pamela's disposition also seemed to interact with general student engagement. Similarly to the

first project, Pamela's stress was brought on by school demands, which were reduced during this project. This minor variation in Pamela's stress levels seemed to contribute to a small improvement in her attitude towards teaching and learning, which seemed to positively impact on student engagement.

7.7 Action Research C2 Reflecting (III): Discussion

The aim of Cycle Two was to re-evaluate the potential of the ProE model for academic, social, emotional and cognitive engagement in a learning activity, in light of the experience and knowledge gained in Cycle One. This was so that we could further ascertain its validity. To achieve this the ProE model was implemented in this Cycle by means of a project (see 7.2, for the characteristics of the project).

Based on the preceding analyses, we can conclude that the ProE model, when fully deployed, resulted in student ASEC engagement with the project. This supports the findings of Cycle One (cf. 6.7), and provides further empirical evidence of the model's effectiveness. These conclusions are drawn from the global and dynamic analyses of the data.

To begin, the global analysis of engagement suggests that the students overall engaged at all levels except emotionally. This would mean that the ProE model worked except for emotional engagement. However, the temporal analysis of engagement suggests that the students in fact did engage at the emotional level for most of the time (i.e., six positive Episodes vs. two negative Episodes for which data is available). Based on this, it would be then reasonable to suggest that a second consideration of the global analysis would then provide a more positive picture of emotional student-engagement. This, in turn, would suggest that the students were academically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally engaged, and by extension, that the ProE model worked efficiently.

In addition, the effectiveness of the ProE model is also evident in the temporal analysis, which shows that student ASEC engagement was present in several Episodes of the project (cf. 7.6.2). Given that the ProE model was the tool used to pursue such engagement, it seems logical to assume that its implementation was a key factor contributing to student ASEC engagement. We can thus state that reasonably addressing (or not fulfilling) the students' needs for meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence greatly contributed to facilitating ASEC engagement. On the contrary, it seems that when some of the elements of the ProE model were not successfully deployed, that this likely negatively impacted on one or more dimensions of engagement. In particular, the analysis of the data showed that the elements of autonomy and belongingness to both peers and the teacher were likely to bring about drops in student engagement when they went unfulfilled. In other words, when the students felt heavily directed and restrained (i.e., not autonomous) and did not have opportunities to socialize with their peers (i.e., belongingness to peers), and also felt that they did not have teacher-support (i.e., belongingness to the teacher), student-engagement was more likely to suffer as a result, in one or many dimensions (e.g., Episodes 4 and 5). This is in line with the findings of prior research that has shown that, the extent to which these two elements are unsupported or unfulfilled has a significant detrimental impact on student engagement (cf. 3.3.3).

For example, regarding autonomy, a rich array of school-based studies has suggested that depriving students of their need for autonomy can result in general disaffection, whereas, the opposite is likely to increase engagement levels in terms of concentration, behaviour, emotions, and thinking (e.g., Deci et al., 1993; Perry 1998; Reeve & Lee, 2014; Reeve et al., 2004; Skinner et al., 2008; Turner 1995; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). As for belongingness, studies have shown that keeping students away from fulfilling their natural need to develop social relationships with other peers and their teachers can be harmful for ASEC engagement (e.g., Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow 1993;

Martin & Dowson, 2009; Plenty et al., 2015) while the opposite might boost it significantly, especially in the case of teacher-student relationships (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Lam et al., 2012; Naeghel et al., 2014; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel 1997). Concerning the former it is worth mentioning that, as we witnessed in the analysis of the facilitators of engagement (cf. 7.6.3), belongingness to the teacher seemed a particularly important element, not only in terms of student engagement but also in terms of attitude formation. This echoes the findings of several studies that have suggested that the quality of the interpersonal relationships that the teacher has with his or her students is a highly influential agent in shaping student-attitudes towards foreign language learning (e.g., Chambers 1999; Fisher 2001; Wright 1999). Notable amongst these studies is Aplin's (1991) investigation that surveyed 200 students (aged 16-19) who had finished their studies of MFL at an earlier stage. The results showed that dislike for the teacher, was a major determinant on the decision not to continue MFL.

The preceding thus suggests the importance of autonomy and belongingness for student engagement, which in turn further supports the argument that neglecting any of the constituent elements of the ProE model in its implementation is likely to result in disengagement (cf. 3.4). Moreover, although not wanting to explore the nature of the connections between a particular facilitator of engagement and the dimensions of engagement it affects, the preceding argument would again underscore the existing interrelatedness amongst dimensions of engagement (cf. 6.7). To illustrate, in Episode 4, the lack of belongingness to the teacher affected the emotional engagement of the students, which in turn, spread to concentration, behaviour, and cognition. This would suggest that emotional engagement plays a prominent role in overall student engagement, since failing to foster this dimension brought the other three down in the aforementioned Episode. As I discussed in Cycle One, this is congruent with research studies that have found that emotional engagement can mediate behavioural engagement (e.g., Skinner et al., 2008) and even cognitive engagement (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2012).

Having presented the arguments that support the effectiveness of the ProE model in this Cycle, I now discuss the context-specific factors that hampered its implementation and thus, impacted on ASEC engagement so that actions can be taken to optimise further deployments of the model. The following elements were encountered:

a) Creativity
b) Difficult students
c) Interruptions
d) Double periods
e) Teacher stress

Starting with creativity, it seems that the majority of students did not find the writing part of the project creative, and this may have had an impact on their engagement, especially at the emotional level. As previously mentioned, this is an issue that has been discussed in developmental psychology where it is argued that creative expression is an adolescent need. As Scales (1991: 14) note:

> Young adolescents need opportunities to express to the external world who they are on the inside, be that in music, writing, sports, art, cooking, or making up games for younger children to play.

In light of this, it seems logical to assume that leaving this need unfulfilled is likely to bring about disaffection of some kind amongst students.

Regarding difficult students, as seen in Cycle One, it appears that inherent negative motivations and attitudes towards learning of the students may have also sometimes affected student engagement. This is something that both engagement and research on attitudes towards learning languages supports, as discussed in 7.6.4. It seems that engagement was affected when difficult students would encourage general misbehaviour. This would affect Pamela's mood, which would in turn create a negative classroom atmosphere (i.e., poor teacher-student relationships). Then, the students would retaliate against Pamela, resulting in a downward spiral. The extent to which the

source of the issue is the students rather than Pamela's management of the classroom however is unclear. The data seems to indicate that Pamela was a strict teacher whose disposition changed easily. Interestingly, it seems that there was a marked improvement in general student-behaviour due to the permanent removal of two students. This positively impacted on Pamela's mood and as a result the atmosphere in the classroom would be lifted in terms of teacher-student relationships. This would further reinforce the relationship between social engagement (or behavioural engagement) and belongingness to the teacher, which has been widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Plenty et al., 2015).

Next, also as in Cycle One, interruptions also arose as an issue during this project. It seems that there were some days in which Pamela could not be present in the classroom and the project had to be temporarily discontinued. Consequently, this would negatively impact on the flow of student-engagement. As I discussed in 6.7, research on human factors and ergonomics seems to support the assumption that student-engagement can be hindered by regular interruptions (e.g., Cades et al., 2010; Foroughi et al., 2014; Spira & Feintuch, 2005). Thus, this finding would be in line with such literature. It is noteworthy though, as shown in 7.6.4, that Pamela did not revert to traditional teaching during Ofsted visits, as she did with the first project, which would suggest that the second project was more enjoyable for her. The data suggests that the change in Pamela's attitude was related to the project being in line with her pedagogical preferences. This would suggest that the strategies adopted in Cycle One (i.e., designing a project to suit her preferences) worked appropriately in this sense — however, we also saw that such strategy impacted on the support of belongingness (to peers) and autonomy (cf. 7.6.3) amongst the students.

In addition, the issue of double periods also seemed to be recurrent. Two-hour long lessons seemed to pose a challenge for the students' engagement partly because of their

inability to keep their levels of concentration up for such an uninterrupted amount of time. As already discussed in 6.7, adolescent neuroscience research explains this on the basis that the attention span of young people is very limited mostly due to their low ability to exercise self-control (see Steinberg 2014, for a discussion). From this, it can be expected that in two-hour long lessons, in which students are not particularly physically active, there is a limit to how much they can engage in learning activities.

Finally, despite the measures taken to reduce Pamela's stress (cf. 6.5), it seems that this issue also persisted during the second project, sometimes affecting overall student engagement by engendering poor teacher-student relationships. In this project, Pamela's workload seemed to occasionally affect our communication and also her mood negatively. And this would seem to ultimately have an impact on student engagement, as this impacted on her classroom management, making her anxious, which would negatively affect her mood thereby generating a negative classroom atmosphere. Also, being in a stressful state of mind would negatively affect her disposition, which would then harm teacher-student relationships (i.e., belongingness to the teacher). However, it must be stated that her stress levels seem to lessen from the first project to the second. It appears that having less school commitments during the second project had a positive impact on her mood, and therefore on her relationships with the students. Nevertheless, as pointed out above, this was not enough to completely eradicate the issue (or stop two students from dropping out of MFL). As already discussed in 6.7, the issue of teacher stress is not new (e.g., Helms-Lorenz et al., 2012; Yorimitsu et al., 2014) and it seems to be very present amongst schoolteachers in the UK (see NASUWT 2015, for a discussion). This current finding would then contribute to engagement research by establishing a relationship between teacher stress and student engagement, an issue which to-date has not been sufficiently addressed.

To conclude this discussion, I would like to dwell now on the parallels between the asystematic analysis (i.e., practitioner account) and the systematic analysis of the inhibitors of engagement in order to bring to light what I have come to learn (as 'researcher') now that the project cycle has come to an end. In the asystematic analysis that I undertook upon completing the second project cycle (i.e., reflection on the factors hindering the ProE model implementation process) I was able to detect most of the inhibitors that arose in the systematic analysis.

Regarding the ProE model, as I noted in 7.5, upon informally reflecting on the data obtained, I perceived that the facilitators of autonomy and belongingness to the teacher (i.e., Pamela) had not been efficiently promoted — whereas I did feel that meaningfulness and competence were successfully deployed. I noticed that the students sometimes did not enjoy been restrained in multiple ways during the first part of the project (e.g., not having a say on aspects of the project, unable to speak to others, etc.), and also Pamela's controlling behaviour (i.e., lack of student-autonomy). I also perceived that the few opportunities for group work during the project, as well as the students' relationships with Pamela, did impact on how students approached the project in terms of their (emotional) engagement.

Concerning the context-specific inhibitors, it seems that in my reflection I did not identify certain key inhibitors on engagement while I accounted for others, sometimes partially. Considering the inhibitors of engagement, I did not identify the lack of opportunities for creative expression as a significant, negative influence on student engagement. Although I was aware of its potential, as evidenced by my integration of this element as a strategy to increase perceived meaningfulness (cf. 7.6.4), I certainly underestimated its importance. Also, I did not make reference to the issues of difficult students or double periods. This was to be expected given that I did not account for them in my practitioner account of the first project cycle (cf. 6.7). Therefore, they were likely

to be overlooked again. Concerning the partly identified inhibitors, although I did not make explicit reference to Pamela's stress as such in the asystematic analysis (a source of poor teacher-student relationships), I did identify the negative effects of her mood on student engagement (the outcome). This would suggest that I was aware that her disposition posed a problem for student-engagement.

Finally, concerning the identified issues, I was able to capture the issue of interruptions in my reflection on the ProE model implementation. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that unlike the inhibitors of engagement overlooked in the asystematic analysis of Cycle One, interruptions were actually identified in the analysis of the first cycle. Additionally, an action plan was devised to address its negative impact on engagement, and yet, this issue persisted in cycle two. However, it can be argued that, in fact, only part of the issue actually re-emerged, meaning that it was partially addressed. As I discussed in 7.6.4, reducing the scope of the project and leaving homework prepared for the days in which the project was interrupted (which was one of the decisions made in the first cycle) did not seem to work as expected, given that the issue reappeared. However, in the same section we saw that designing the project according to Pamela's preferences (the second course of action decided) did seem to stop her from interrupting the project by reverting to traditional teaching during Ofsted inspections — although this action thwarted the support of the facilitators of belongingness (to both peers and the teacher) and autonomy (cf. 7.6.3).

The preceding arguments suggest that my reflection or informal analysis on the overall performance of the ProE model, although it provides a fairly broad view of the problems that arose during the implementation of the ProE model, is still not sufficiently comprehensive. This is suggested by the fact that, in this cycle, the informal analysis overlooked key inhibitors of the process such as 'creativity', 'difficult students' and

'double periods'. Moreover, it was only able to identify parts of larger issues (e.g., Pamela's stress).

Therefore, this finding would further support the idea developed in the first cycle (cf. 6.7) that research methodologies that employ unsophisticated methods of analysis such as reflective practices should be complemented with systematic analyses that provide an (arguably) objective and broad vision of the same events in order to obtain the most complete picture possible (see Denscombe 2010, for a discussion).

Overall, I conclude by putting forward some suggestions for improvement based on the issues encountered during the implementation of the ProE model in this project cycle. As this is the last cycle of this research study (i.e., the last implementation of the ProE model), the suggestions below should be then considered as the directions that I would follow in the case of a hypothetical third cycle with this particular group of students:

- **Autonomy**: It seems that not being the active agents of their own learning affected students' engagement, mostly at the emotional level. Therefore, I believe that in a third project it would be key to support more student-autonomy. Based on the experience of this project and the former, I think that the best options would be to (a) involve the students more in the project design and implementation, (b) find ways to improve student-behaviour so that they can be trusted with autonomy, and (c) to achieve the former, persuade Pamela to be a more supportive of student-autonomy by perhaps making her see the impact that controlling behaviours may have on this specific group of students.
- **Belongingness** (to peers): As this project has shown, the students did not seem happy with the limited opportunities they had to work (or develop relationships) with their peers, and that occasionally prompted disengagement, especially at the emotional level. This would suggest that extending the amount of group work might help towards increasing a perceived sense of belongingness (to

peers) (see Martin & Dowson, 2009, for a discussion). For this, I would need Pamela to go beyond her traditional teaching practices to a point in which she still feels comfortable, but at the same, not deprive students of their need for belongingness.

- **Belongingness** (to the teacher): The quality of teacher-student relationships seemed to be key to student-engagement as was observed in both projects. In this present project, it was additionally found that negative relationships were also harmful for student attitudes towards MFL. For that reason, I believe that it would be essential to identify a possible solution with Pamela's input. As we know that stress was one of the most influential factors affecting her disposition, both directly (i.e., putting her in a bad mood) and indirectly (i.e., making her anxious in the lessons due to not having prepared them sufficiently), I could assist her by taking on more project-related responsibilities thereby almost completely relieving her of any project responsibilities. Also, each week, I could go an extra day to the school and meet with her to ensure that we plan the project together so that she does not get lost in the lessons, and in turn, feel anxious.
- **Creativity**: Depriving students of their need for creative expression for most of the project seemed to have had a negative impact on their engagement with this project. For this reason, I believe that in the cycles to follow, the students should be allowed to exercise this need in the learning activity (see Scales 1991, for a discussion), as was done in Cycle One. A possible option could be embedding more arts and crafts in the project so that the students are producing tangible things as they go along. For example, the essay that they produced in this project could have easily been written in a poster format or as a Power Point presentation.

- **Difficult students**: The inherent nature of the students seemed to pose another challenge for the deployment of the ProE model, and thus on student-engagement, in both projects. To deal with the general low motivation and attitudes of the students I believe that the best course of action would be to continue to provide engaging experiences so that that can contribute, over time, to developing positive mind-sets (cf. 2.3). This, in the long run, should help to further reduce the size of this issue (see Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, for a discussion). It seems that the most immediate way to achieve this is by further implementing the ProE model in a new learning activity in light of the experience gained in this project.
- **Interruptions**: Regular pauses throughout the project seemed to dampen student engagement as well. As this particular inhibitor of engagement is beyond the teacher's control, and seemed to be the norm in my research context, I would suggest that a following implementation of the ProE model considers a smaller learning activity. As I suggested in the analysis of this particular inhibitor it could be that the vehicle adopted to implement the ProE model (i.e., projects) needs to be reconsidered and perhaps even changed for a different type of learning activity that requires less time to accomplish (e.g., weekly tasks), while still allowing for fostering meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence.
- **Double periods**: Two-hour long lessons also did seem to take a toll on student engagement. In light of this, I feel that including a creative element in such lessons could contribute to prevent the students from disengaging with the lessons. It seems that allowing the students to do autonomous, creative, hands-on work would not only keep them active, but would also, in turn, make it more difficult for them to lose focus (see Scales 1991, for a discussion). This, could

be further improved by adding group work into the equation (see Fredricks 2014, for a discussion).

- **Teacher stress**: Finally, as discussed above, the pressures that Pamela was under during the second project ultimately affected student-engagement negatively. To prevent this from happening in a third cycle, as much as possible, I feel that I should try to meet with her in person at the school on a separate day (e.g., at the beginning of the week) to ensure that the lesson is jointly planned. I also believe that I should relieve her of the scholastic responsibilities that the implementation of the ProE model may generate, with the hope that that may lighten her load.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Conclusion of the Study

The aim of this study was to find a suitable way to promote student engagement in the MFL classroom. This took the form of a two-fold solution to positively shape adolescents' attitudes towards foreign language learning and thus help stimulate student uptake of languages in later school stages. This problem arises due to the seemingly low status that foreign language learning has in Britain (cf. 2.2). In response to this situation, the ProE model for fostering student academic, social, emotional and cognitive engagement in learning activities in MFL contexts was proposed, and its potential to achieve such outcomes assessed.

The ProE model was deployed twice during the academic year 2013-2014 in the form of two language-learning projects, in a group of 19 (difficult and male-dominated) Year 9 students from a state school in England. The results from both implementations seem to confirm that the ProE model can contribute to promoting student engagement in learning activities at academic, social, emotional, and cognitive levels when it is fully deployed. The findings underpinning this conclusion are that:

a) When all the elements of the ProE model were supported in the learning activities (i.e., projects), namely meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence, student ASEC engagement was in turn positively affected in such activities.
b) When the elements of the ProE model were unsupported or thwarted, specifically autonomy, belongingness and competence, engagement was diminished as a result in one or many dimensions in the activities.

Therefore, as theorised at the beginning of this study (cf. 3.4), it seems that all the elements of the ProE model need to be deployed in order to foster ASEC student engagement in learning activities.

Interestingly, in the case of meaningfulness, since it seemed to have been successfully deployed in both research cycles, I was unable to observe the effect its absence could have on student ASEC engagement. I can only assume then that its absence could possibly dampen student engagement overall. Nevertheless, in light of the positive impact that this element had on engagement in both research cycles, the large amount of studies that ascertain its potential for student engagement (cf. 3.3.3), and the consideration that this element is a developmental need of adolescence (Scales 1991), I conclude that neglecting such a facilitator of engagement could have detrimental effects on student engagement.

Furthermore, there are additional reasons that further underscore the potential of the ProE model to stimulate ASEC engagement. One of these reasons is that the participants of this study were a male-dominated, Year 9 group with a high percentage of difficult students, known for being disruptive, defiant, attention-seeking, and/or unmotivated (cf. 4.2). Therefore, from this it can be argued that the success of the ProE model with this particular group further strengthens its transferability to other MFL contexts. This is based on the logical assumption that if it worked despite the challenges posed by the characteristics of this group it is likely to function more effectively with groups of average students.

Another reason that further justifies the validity of the ProE model is that it was deployed through a project activity rather than through a shorter activity that lasts, for example, for a class period. Thus, as projects are long-term engagements, motivation and engagement is more difficult to sustain (Dörnyei et al., 2013). This can be justified on the basis that human beings cannot stay motivated or engaged all the time (see

Wentzel et al., 2009, for a discussion). The fact that the students stayed engaged in Episodes during the intervention and, that lack of engagement was mainly due to a failure to effectively roll out one or various components of the ProE model (e.g., competence, belongingness to the teacher), suggests that if every component of the ProE model was successfully promoted, ASEC engagement would have remained relatively constant for most of the duration of the project. Based on this, it is then possible to argue that if the ProE model can achieve these outcomes in long-term learning activities it is expected that it will achieve better ones in smaller-sized activities in which long-term engagement is not necessary. That being said, it is important to note that small-sized activities should still be of a suitable length to facilitate student engagement. This is one of the reasons why I defined learning activities as structured tasks aimed at assessing knowledge in a formal way (cf. 3.4). I believe this understanding of activities aligns with the minimum threshold level in activity-length necessary for full engagement.

A final reason that potentially supports the ProE model's validity for ASEC engagement is that its implementation seemed to engage students in Episodes regardless of the contextual inhibitors it was subjected to. Particularly, students seemed to engage in Episodes containing double-periods and also even after interruptions to the project. As discussed in this thesis, these elements were identified as having a negative effect on student-engagement in both projects. Nevertheless, their impact did not seem sufficient to prevent the ProE model from achieving its aims.

8.2 Contributions to Knowledge

This investigation contributes primarily to the field of MFL research. Nevertheless, it also has implications for other areas, such as applied linguists in language education research, general education research, PBL research, and engagement research.

8.2.1 Contributions to MFL Research

Starting out with the first area, as already discussed, MFL student uptake is currently declining. In the UK, a high percentage of students discontinue studying languages at an early age; a problem that seems to be associated with a nationwide, negative attitude towards foreign language learning (Bartram 2010). Consequently, this study contributes to the field of MFL primarily by offering an assessed pedagogical model that can stimulate regular student ASEC engagement in the MFL classroom, which, in turn, may contribute to the positive transformation of student attitudes towards foreign language learning. In other words, it is known that if students have positive experiences in the (MFL) classroom on a daily basis, they eventually form a positive mindset about the subject they learn (Herrenkohl & Guerra, 1998; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

This is supported by the findings of both research cycles (cf. 6.7 and 7.7): in the Episodes where the ProE model was fully deployed, the majority of participants engaged academically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. On the other hand, data from the second research cycle (cf. 7.6.3) suggests that in instances where the model is not fully deployed on a regular basis (i.e., on-going weak support of positive teacher-student relationships), students' overall perception of the subject studied was negatively affected — hence (mildly) supporting the supposition that engagement influences attitudes.

In relation to this, this study also contributes to MFL by presenting a potential solution to begin tackling the current issue of secondary students having insular attitudes towards foreign language learning directly from the MFL classroom. This consists of a combined action plan of both fostering student (ASEC) engagement and explicitly promoting the utility value of foreign language learning (cf. 2.3). It is believed that this dual approach, because of its potential to transform secondary school students' attitudes, may help towards positively shaping attitudes on a national scale so that the British society can begin to redevelop its views on foreign language learning.

It is therefore important to highlight the fact that the learning activity (i.e., projects) implemented during the second research cycle encapsulated both elements discussed above. Firstly, its design and implementation adhered (more or less faithfully) to the guidelines proposed by the ProE model and, secondly, it sought to raise awareness of the value of foreign languages in terms of employability (students were encouraged to discover and reflect on how learning Spanish could help them in the future). The results showed (cf. 7.6.3) that in some instances participating in this learning activity seemed to be the deciding factor in determining whether students chose to continue studying languages in KS3. This would suggest that the two-fold intervention suggested above (student engagement combined with increased student-awareness of the career value of studying languages) may well contribute to positively shaping attitudes toward foreign language learning.

8.2.2 Contributions to Applied Linguistics in Language Education Research

This investigation contributes to the field of applied linguistics in language education mainly by broadening the field and letting (further) education research flow into it. This is done through the engineering of a pedagogical model for student engagement in learning activities (in this study, designed especially for MFL settings) that draws on the findings of decades of educational and psychology research (cf. 3.4).

I opine that the field of applied linguistics primarily focuses on language-learning research. It seems to me that a high percentage of language-learning studies conducted, especially along the lines of this present study (i.e., involving adolescent language students), do not lean as much as they might on the findings of previous educational research to design their investigations or interventions, and/or interpret their findings. Rather, more often than not, we observe that they draw mostly on language-learning research.

Notable examples of this are the many studies in the area of motivation and language learning that lean substantially on the works of language-learning scholars such as Zoltan Dörnyei (e.g., Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Jauregi et al., 2012; Lanvers 2012; Magid & Chan, 2012; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013; Ruesch et al., 2012; Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010, 2012; Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013; Wong 2014). This would seem somewhat short sighted, given that motivation is a complex area of educational psychology for which a substantial number of theoretical and empirical works are published every year across every level of education in education research. Thus, the current apparent trend in language learning research, in which researchers seem to not fully appreciate the complexities of such an extensive body of literature to inform their investigations, may be harming the advancement of knowledge in applied linguistics.

Even more relevant to my argument, is the fact that engagement research, despite thriving for over a decade in education research (Christenson et al., 2012), does not seem to have yet penetrated the field of language learning. And this further highlights the lack of reliance of language-learning researchers on educational research findings.

To illustrate, firstly, 'motivation' seems to be the buzzword resonating across every corner of the language-learning landscape, as revealed by the number of works produced on this topic. For example, a search in the Web of Science (today's premier index of journal articles and other publications on the social sciences, arts and humanities) at the moment of writing this reveals 635 hits for motivation works:

- TITLE: (motivation) *OR* TITLE: (motivating)
- Refined by: RESEARCH DOMAINS: (SOCIAL SCIENCES) AND RESEARCH AREAS: (LINGUISTICS)
- Timespan: All years.
- Search language=Auto

While a similar search for engagement works shows 260 hits:

- TITLE: (engagement) *OR* TITLE: (engaging)
- Refined by: RESEARCH DOMAINS: (SOCIAL SCIENCES) AND RESEARCH AREAS: (LINGUISTICS)
- Timespan: All years.
- Search language=Auto

The second factor suggesting that engagement research is significantly under-examined in language-learning research is the fact that in my extensive search of the literature, only three research studies emerged addressing modern engagement research by conceiving the engagement as a multidimensional construct composed by behaviour, emotion, and cognition (i.e., Shamsini 2012; Yang 2011 and Strout 2015). This seeming lacuna would suggest that, in the field of applied linguistics, especially in the areas of motivation and engagement, there is room to expand the boundaries beyond solely language-learning research and embrace educational research developments. This seems reasonable given that motivation and engagement are psychological phenomena. Thus, findings from educational research hold great interest and applicability for applied linguistics researchers, as evidenced in this study.

8.2.3 Contributions to General Education Research

In addition to the field of applied linguistics, this study contributes to the field of education by offering a novel pedagogical model (i.e., the ProE model), which has been assessed, and whose implementation can contribute to fostering student academic, social, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities in secondary school settings. In fact, because it emerges from decades of findings of educational, social and developmental psychology research conducted internationally, this is a model whose application may be extended beyond the MFL context in which it was implemented. Psychology research has consistently demonstrated that the ProE model's constituents of

meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness and competence, when supported in learning activities, are capable of fostering student engagement regardless of student personality or individual differences, socio-economic status, ethnicity and/or gender (see, for example, Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Based on this, it seems legitimate to argue that the ProE model for student ASEC engagement in learning activities would be able to attain similar outcomes in secondary school subjects other than MFL, and also internationally.

8.3.4 Contributions to PBL research

Moving on, this study contributes to the area of PBL research in two ways. Firstly, PBL is regarded as a useful method for fostering student engagement in the classroom (Boss et al., 2013). Thus, several studies have demonstrated that when students work on an authentic endeavour (i.e., meaningfulness) that empowers them (i.e., autonomy) and also allows them to work with their peers (i.e., belongingness) this generally results in engagement (e.g., Boaler 2002; Cognition & Vanderbilt, 1992; Marx et al., 1997; Thomas 2000).

Interestingly, although studies telling us about the potential of PBL for student engagement exist, from my experience with the literature, I have come to realise that these studies treat with engagement at a fairly general level. That is, it seems that PBL research does not usually conceptualise engagement as a multidimensional construct constituted by, for example, the dimensions of behaviour, emotion and cognition (e.g., Boaler 2002; Cognition & Vanderbilt, 1992; Marx et al., 1997; Thomas 2000), but generally as a concept that refers in some way to positive behaviour in the classroom. Accordingly, from a modern perspective on engagement, it could be then argued that there is insufficient empirical evidence to show that PBL promotes thorough engagement (i.e., behavioural, emotional, and cognitive). I believe that this research study contributes then to PBL research in that it supports the assumption that this instructional method, when strictly following the principles of meaningfulness,

autonomy, belongingness, and competence, can indeed foster student ASEC engagement.

Secondly, another contribution to the field of PBL is the fact that this research study employs the PBL method in a language-learning setting. The seeming lack of empirical research in PBL in the area of language-learning is evidenced in search results, such as the following query on Web of Science, which shows only 14 hits:

- TITLE: (PBL) *OR* TITLE: (Project-based learning)
- Refined by: RESEARCH DOMAINS: (SOCIAL SCIENCES) AND RESEARCH AREAS: (LINGUISTICS)
- Timespan: All years.
- Search language=Auto

Whereas the same query in educational research shows 944 hits:

- TITLE: (PBL) *OR* TITLE: (Project-based learning)
- Refined by: RESEARCH DOMAINS: (SOCIAL SCIENCES) AND RESEARCH AREAS: (EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH)
- Timespan: All years.
- Search language=Auto

Therefore, most studies in PBL seem to come from general education research and university settings. In light of this, the present research study expands the limited, but growing volume of literature that investigates the affordances of PBL in language-learning in school contexts.

8.2.5 Contributions to Engagement Research

Finally, this study contributes to engagement research from several angles. Perhaps the most interesting contribution of this study is that it proposes an assessed pedagogical

model to foster student ASEC engagement in learning activities in early and late adolescent education. As discussed in 3.4, engagement research seems to have focused most of its efforts on developing its theoretical side — e.g., delimitating the construct of engagement, exploring the relationships between its components and interactions between student engagement and the context where it develops, and/or engineering reliable research instruments to successfully assess student engagement (see Christenson et al., 2012, for a discussion). This could be explained on the basis that student engagement is a relatively new subfield of education research and therefore it first needs to determine its fundamental tenets.

Furthermore, most engagement research has concentrated on promoting engagement at the school level so as to combat school attrition (see, Eccles & Wang, 2012, for a discussion), thus leaving the classroom learning context and, in particular, the area of learning activities somewhat unattended. Consequently, I argue, that it seems that, to date, engagement models tailored to pedagogical use in secondary education, both at the classroom and activity levels, are scarce, particularly those aiming to foster student engagement in terms of behaviour, emotion, and thinking. Certainly, a few approximations have been made over the years both in motivation and engagement research. However, these do not often seem to come in the form of pedagogical models but rather as a set of isolated variables, specially selected to promote student ASEC engagement in learning activities during one-off interventions (e.g., Malloy et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2014); or as extensive lists of facilitators that promote student ASEC engagement (e.g., Belland et al., 2013). Moreover, when actual pedagogical models are presented, they conceive student engagement in restricted terms (e.g., Keller 1987), namely as motivated behaviour (i.e., positive behaviour and/or positive emotion), rather than as a multidimensional construct formed by behaviour, emotion and cognition. Also, while some models or semi-models do seek to foster ASEC engagement in learning activities, they do so in primary school contexts rather than in secondary ones (e.g.,

Malloy et al., 2013). This could possibly justify why secondary school teachers seem to have difficulty in designing learning activities that engage their adolescent students academically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

Next, this study adds to the limited volume of research studies that explore engagement at the activity level. Because engagement research partly originates in response to student attrition in schools (see Finn & Zimmer, 2012, for a discussion), it seems understandable that most studies on student engagement would explore this construct at the school level (see Fredricks et al., 2011, for examples). With the classroom level gaining prominence over the past two decades, possibly due to the approximation of motivation research (particularly interested in the classroom setting, evidenced in the large volume of literature available on this topic) to engagement research (see Eccles & Wang, 2012), the interest seems to have extended to classroom engagement and seems be increasing. In fact, modern discussions in the literature have made a call for studies that explore student engagement at the activity level (e.g., Skinner & Pitzer, 2012), since learning activities appear to be the motor of classroom engagement; wherein lies the value of my contribution.

Moreover, this study also adds to the emergent call for research studies that support a longitudinal rather than solely retrospective approach to the analysis of the construct of engagement (e.g., Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Greene 2015; Turner et al., 2014). Thus, in this study we have observed that looking at student engagement across time allows one to obtain a richer understanding of this phenomenon than when explored holistically. This is mainly because such an approach reveals the ebb and flows of student engagement, which is relatively imperceptible in studies that look into the construct globally. This approach also allows the researcher to more easily identify the causes for engagement or disengagement.

Additionally, this study furthers the understanding of engagement by showing what facilitates and diminishes engagement in a specific research context, and what happens when conditions are altered. It therefore, responds to modern research calls for studying engagement in context rather than as an isolated variable (e.g., Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). In this study we observed that ASEC engagement in learning activities was facilitated by the successful deployment of the elements of the ProE model. Contrastingly, it was diminished by the lack of support of such elements and also by context-specific factors such as: insufficient pedagogical knowledge, poor student disposition (low motivation and difficult), limited opportunities for creative expression in the projects, interruptions to the project, two-hour long lessons, and poor teacher disposition (stress).

With regard to the inhibitors of engagement, I believe that the aforementioned are also an interesting contribution to the field of engagement. This is because it would appear that engagement research usually concentrates on exploring what facilitates engagement rather than on what hampers it. Therefore, there seems to be more information available on what makes students engage (i.e., facilitators). On this view, my findings, although unique to my context, may help engagement researchers in their quest to promote optimal student engagement.

What is more, this study adds to the small volume of studies that investigate student engagement from a qualitative angle, while also using mixed methods approaches. As already discussed in this thesis (cf. 4.3), the majority of studies conducted in the area of student engagement are primarily quantitative and single-method (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for a discussion). This is possibly due to the fact that psychology research still maintains a somewhat positivist tradition, which is characterised by quantifying data related to how humans act, feel, and think with an aim to providing objective and abstract understandings (see Camic et al., 2003, for a discussion).

Consequently, engagement researchers have recently made calls for studies to go beyond the use of quantification and to start looking at student engagement as a phenomenon that can only be fully understood when looked at closely (i.e., qualitatively) and from different angles (i.e., multi-method), as opposed to from a narrow and distant perspective (i.e., quantitatively and single-method) (see Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, for a discussion).

In this study we observed first-hand that quantitative methods were not always able to give an accurate picture of the events, as results would sometimes be contradicted by qualitative data, thereby calling into question the reliability of these methods to provide truthful information. This in turn supported, (a) the notion of using qualitative methods of inquiry given their ability to delve deeper into the phenomenon investigated and (b) the assumption of using multiple methods of research for a better understanding. In regard of the latter, we also observed in this study (i.e., when in Cycle One teacher qualitative data contradicted student quantitative data), that sometimes, even when interpreting data from two different research instruments, two different paradigms of inquiry may not be sufficient to truly understand the phenomenon, which further strengthens the argument for multi-method approaches.

Finally, this study contributes to engagement research in that it takes a step towards the regularisation of the definitions and measures of student engagement at the level of learning activities. Thus, as discussed in 3.2.3, in engagement research it is common for researchers to vary in how they operationalize (a) the construct of student engagement (e.g., as composed of one, two, three or more dimensions); (b) the dimensions of student engagement (e.g., cognitive engagement as cognitive strategy use vs. psychological investment in learning); and (c) the indicators of the dimensions of engagement (e.g., cognitive engagement in learning activities represented by going beyond minimal requirements in the activity vs. effort to develop the activity). To make matters worse,

research studies also often build on findings of studies that explore student engagement at levels, which differ from those identified in their individual studies, to make their claims (e.g., Li & Lerner, 2012).

Furthermore, it is not surprising that leading scholars are calling for the field to come to a stronger consensus on definitions and measures for student engagement at specific levels (e.g., Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, since the present approach makes it difficult to interpret findings. In response to this, this study has proposed a conceptualisation of student engagement in learning activities that:

a) Uses a tripartite conceptualisation of student engagement including a behavioural, emotional, and cognitive subcomponent.
b) Adopts a line of inquiry for each dimension of engagement that is appropriate to the context of learning activities and easily recognisable in the classroom.
c) Features a set of indicators for the dimensions of engagement that is clear, minimal and, to a great extent, general; which also reflect the consensus of 265 schoolteachers.

8.3 Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The limitations of this present study revolve around the following topics:

- Limited number of participants
- Poorly focused research instruments
- More angles of inquiry necessary
- Study engagement in individual cases rather than in general
- Incomplete analysis of the facilitators of ASEC engagement

The most immediate limitation that can be found in this study is the small number of participants. Thus, the conclusions of this study are based on the results obtained in one

MFL classroom composed of 19 participants. This implies that the validity of the ProE model for MFL contexts cannot be established but only suggested. Thus, a direction for future research would be to implement the ProE model in other MFL secondary classrooms across Britain as well as in other countries in order to further assess its potential to promote ASEC engagement.

Another limitation of this study is that as a result of fine-tuning the focus of this investigation once the action research process had started, its quality may have been compromised. I refer here particularly to including the temporal analysis of ASEC engagement, which I decided to undertake after the study was over for reasons specified in 6.6.1.2. Thus, the research instruments (i.e., the research journal and the open-response questionnaires) employed in this type of analysis had not been designed to obtain data for this specific purpose. Consequently, there were Episodes in which data pertaining to one or many dimensions of student engagement were not available. I believe that had I made this decision before the AR intervention, I would have been able to obtain more and better-focused data, which in turn, would have helped me provide a clearer picture of student ASEC engagement with the project across the Episodes. Ultimately, the latter would have allowed me to better ascertain the potential of the ProE model for student ASEC engagement, which highlights another area for future research.

In connection to the limitation above is the fact that this study fell short in angles of inquiry. This claim particularly refers to the global and temporal analyses of ASEC engagement. Thus, as was observed in the research cycles, at times it was difficult in the global analysis to ascertain the manifestation of a particular dimension of engagement due to discrepancies between student and teacher data. As I argued, a third perspective would have significantly helped clarify the extent to which a particular dimension of engagement was achieved (e.g., classroom observations). Moreover, the temporal analysis heavily relied on research journal data, which is inherently subjective, and

therefore brings into question the overall veracity of the temporal analysis. This issue could potentially have been avoided by collecting data during the implementation of the ProE model from other angles (e.g., student diaries). Thus, future work could employ more research instruments of data collection (mostly of a qualitative nature) both during the implementation of the ProE model and at the end of it, so as to better capture (the complexities of) student ASEC engagement.

A further limitation of this study is that it explores ASEC engagement at a general rather than an individual level. As with any study that focuses on the general rather than on what is distinctive, it inevitably leaves a gap in one's understanding and, in this case the gap refers to why certain students were not affected by the ProE model in the same manner. Future studies could thus fill this gap exploring individual experiences of student ASEC engagement in addition to general ones. Future investigations with similar participants should also examine individual or other within-group differences such as gender (when one gender is predominant) or English as an additional language status (when such students are present in the classroom) in relation to engagement. This would likely provide important information to further understand the potential of the ProE model for student engagement.

Another limitation is that both the facilitators and the inhibitors of engagement were also studied in general terms (i.e., at a classroom level) and in retrospection. As previously mentioned, this created a gap in understanding why the ProE model affected some students and not others. In addition, through these analyses it was also difficult to connect the enactment of facilitators and the inhibitors of engagement with particular Episodes. At times, I was unable to justify the source(s) of disengagement in a particular Episode, as the research instruments that collected data across time were not designed to capture these kinds of factors. This suggests then that additional research could: (a)

focus on individual, in addition to, general experiences, and (b) design research instruments that explore facilitators and inhibitors to engagement in each Episode.

Along similar lines, a final limitation of this study is that the analysis of the facilitators of ASEC engagement only concentrated on the components of the ProE model, for reasons discussed in 6.6.2. Therefore, such analyses did not account for the context-specific factors that positively affected student engagement, in addition to the ProE model, thus leaving another gap in understanding. In response to this, future research studies should not only study the behaviour of meaningfulness, autonomy, belongingness, and competence, but also explore what other facilitators prompt students into ASEC engagement in learning activities.

8.4 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I would like to reflect on the impact that this research has had on my professional outlook. This study has allowed me to become acquainted with the British school education context. Having taught at the secondary education level in Spain, I have come to appreciate some differences between both countries. Thus, some of the things that stood out (in addition to the striking fact that schoolchildren can discontinue learning languages) in the particular school where I worked, are that 1) students rather than teachers move from classroom to classroom, 2) students do not stay in the same group across subjects and schooling stages, 3) students address teachers by title rather than by name, 4) students have lunch at school rather than at home, 5) both the students and the teacher follow a formal dress code, 6) there seems to be a school spirit, and 7) students are not forced to buy their books. These differences have taught me that school settings, across countries, despite looking very much alike on the surface, really are not. This underscores the importance of a more critical approach to my future international research studies.

On another note, this research study has honed my research skills to the point that I now feel confident to conduct further research without the need of regular supervision. Some of the (transferable) research skills that I believe I have gained from this experience are research skills and techniques, research management (e.g., time-management, prioritising), personal effectiveness (e.g., self-discipline), written and oral communication, networking and team work skills, self-awareness and the ability to identify my own training needs.

In addition, this experience has humbled me as a researcher. For example, I have come to understand that no study goes without contextual constraints. In my particular case, I designed an intervention with a somewhat idealised context in mind (e.g., optimal conditions) — probably due to engaging with academic literature that generally portrays educational settings in a positive light, as I mention below. This resulted in a rather shocking beginning to the study where I sometimes found myself lost or unable to quickly and efficiently react to the challenges that my research context posed. Some of the most notorious were caused by a group of very difficult students — with needs beyond my capabilities (e.g., personalised and on-going academic and personal support) — or a teacher suffering from the burnout syndrome, as was highlighted throughout this study.

On the other hand, prior to the PhD, I was a researcher who was guided by rather idealistic academic literature, perhaps due to my personal desire to change things. I had idealistic views about education and research — which I believe is somewhat ironic having been a teacher for a few years before becoming a researcher. This would suggest, nevertheless, how quickly one's view could become distorted having left the classroom setting. My idealism is evidenced in the fact that I had to reduce the scope of this PhD study, concentrating on student engagement only after realising that focusing on student attitude transformation would be entirely over-ambitious. All in all, I believe that I have

learnt my lesson, and henceforth, I will try to moderate my idealism with some scepticism.

Finally, this study has also contributed to my professional development by giving me further teaching experience with adolescents, which is something that would not have occurred had I not adopted an action research approach. Thus, teaching at the school level is something that I had certainly missed and that indeed, has contributed to making me a more rounded teacher. For example, I believe that during this study I have become more skilled at lesson planning for adolescent audiences, which requires a great deal of effort in order to get students' interested in the lesson before being able to effectively teach them. I also believe I have become more systematic (e.g., more organised) and structured (e.g., giving clearer directions, providing shorter-term goals, etc.) in every aspect of my teaching. Finally, I have further developed my interpersonal skills with (difficult) adolescents. This could be summarised as learning to communicate positively with the students by listening to their ideas and showing appreciation for what they have to say, and also by dealing with and solving conflict in non-violent ways. I believe that this study has been especially meaningful due to the fact that, for the first time in my career, I was made to deeply reflect on my practice for an extended period of time.

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Appendix A: Teachers' Questionnaire on Student Engagement

To better understand the idea of 'student engagement in learning activities,' and thereby select 'elementary' indicators for each dimension of engagement (i.e., behavioural, emotional, and cognitive) according to my definitions, I surveyed 265 schoolteachers online (see Image A.1 for a copy of the questionnaire). To accomplish this, I prepared an online questionnaire consisting of three pages with six questions in total. I subsequently piloted this questionnaire on 11 MFL teachers to fine tune the questions and assess the teachers' time of completion. The structure of the questionnaire is described below.

Page One contained a consent form that the respondent had to accept in order to be able to access the actual questionnaire. I developed this form by adhering to Dörnyei's (2007) guidelines for reasonably informed consent discussed in Table 4.5.

Page Two encompassed three open-ended questions (two of them partly close-ended) in order to gather basic personal information to help me organise the respondents (see 4.4 for the definitions and purposes of open-ended and close-ended questionnaire items). These were *country where teaching*, *subject taught*, and *e-mail address*. The questions regarding 'country where teaching' and 'subject taught' required an answer, whereas the 'e-mail address' question was optional given that its main aim was to enrol the participant in a prize draw of $100 for completing the questionnaire.

On another note, I targeted the respondents on the American online networking application for schoolteachers, Edmodo, as it is the biggest social network of its kind to my knowledge. For this reason, I only provided two options for the question 'country of residence': the close-ended 'US' and the open-ended 'Other'. The answers to these questions are presented in Figure A.1 below. At this point, it is important to acknowledge the limitations that targeting American schoolteachers poses, as this may limit the transferability of findings to a UK context. Regardless, I consider the administration of the questionnaire worthier of pursuit rather than merely adhering to a list of indicators commonly used in engagement studies. As discussed in 3.2.3, popular indicators of student engagement seem to emanate from theoretical postulations rather than from thorough observations of the ways students engage in the classroom, which in turn casts doubt on their practical validity.

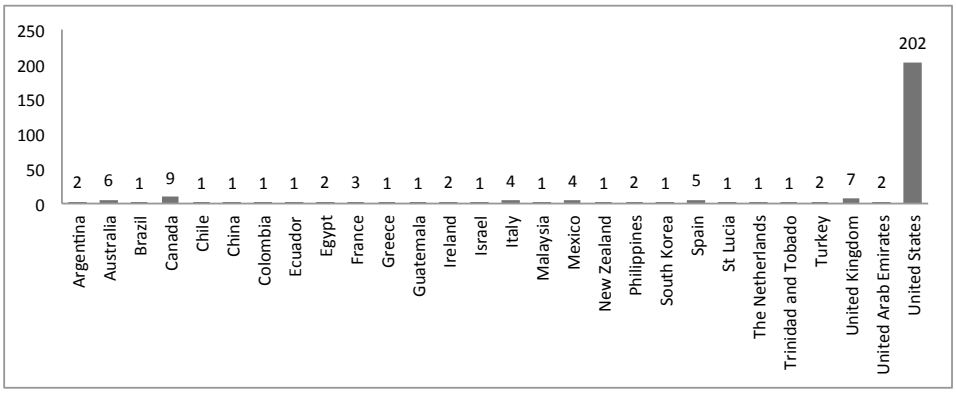


Figure A.1: Number of participants by country

In a similar fashion, I also provided two options for the question 'subject that you teach': a close-ended item comprising a list of core subjects corresponding with the American curriculum of secondary education, and the open-ended 'Other'. I opted for the American curriculum rather than the British one, merely on the grounds that the main audience of the questionnaire was composed of US-based schoolteachers, so I wanted to avoid confusion. In another connection, the 'Other' option was placed to gather insights from other areas not featured in the subject list. The reason I decided not to limit the questionnaire participants to MFL teachers only (or US equivalent) was because I felt that the opinions of the broader educational community would have as much validity as those from language teachers. Adolescent engagement is significantly determined by psychological factors rather than subject-specific ones (see Fredricks et al., 2004, for a discussion). However, it can be argued that students have different expectations for success across diverse subjects (see Gottfried et al., 2001; Grouws & Lembke, 1996, for a discussion), which would make a particular subject susceptible to initially dampening student engagement. Thus, I believe that student engagement is not an issue that exclusively affects language teachers, but one that involves the educational community as a whole. Figure A.2 below shows the number of teachers participating by subject area. 'Other' refers to subjects not included in the list, such as philosophy, theology, choral music, and Latin, amongst others.

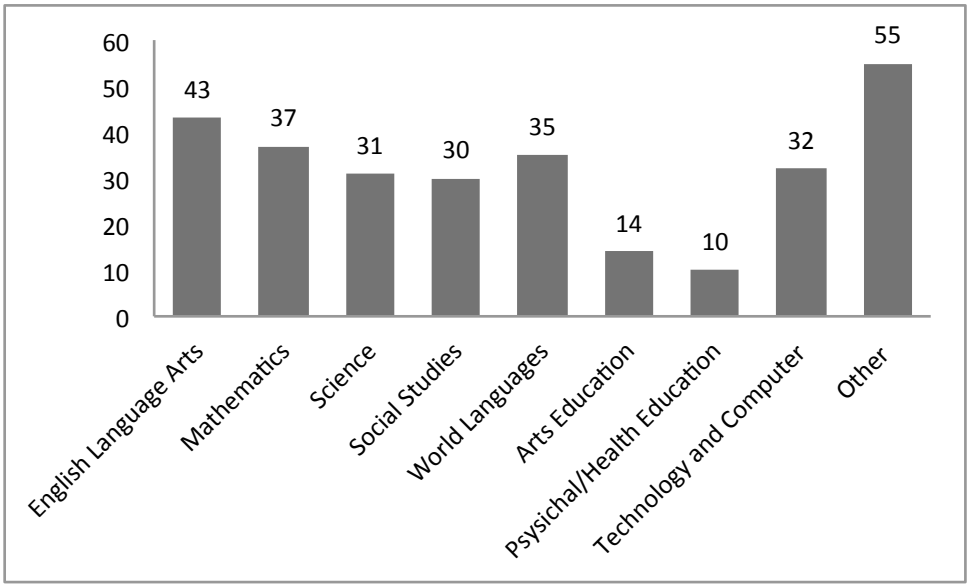


Figure A.2: Number of schoolteachers by subject

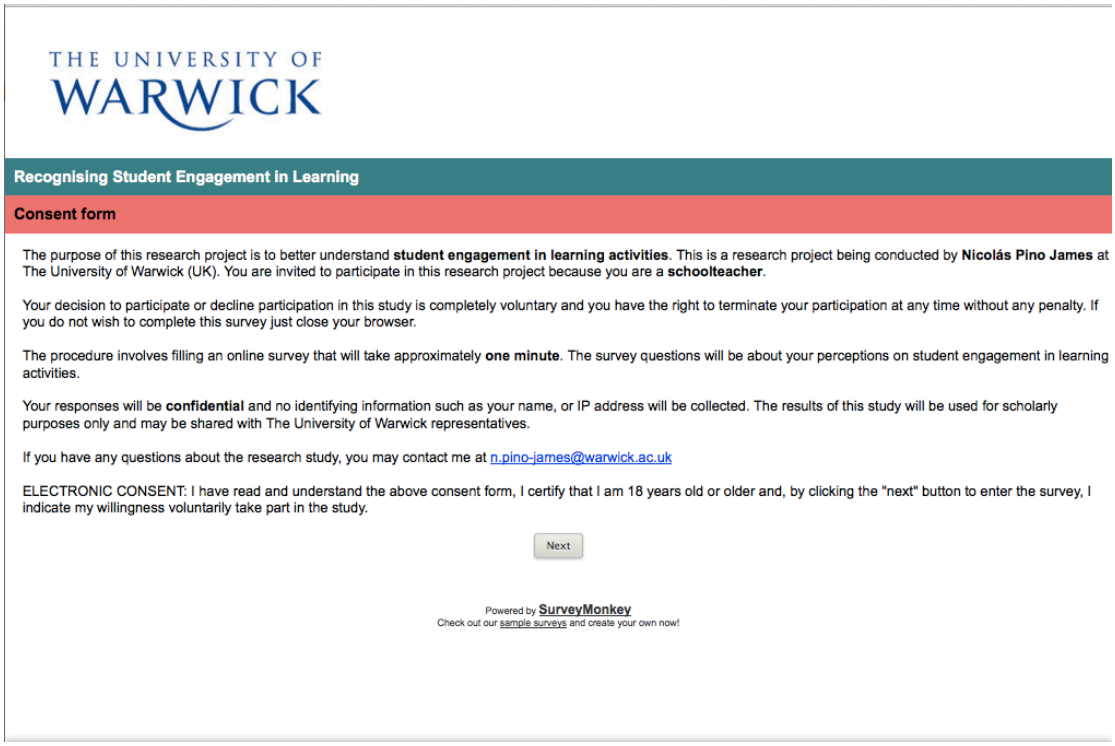
Page 3 was comprised of three questions. These were the actual questionnaire items through which I hoped to capture valuable information regarding the (observable) indicators of each dimension of engagement. For this, I used the prompt (i.e., *What are the observable signs that tell you that a student is engaged in a learning activity…*) followed by three open-ended questions (i.e., *…in terms of their behaviour, …in terms of their emotions,* and *…in terms of the mental effort they invest in the activity*). The questions were accompanied by examples to help the participants provide an answer. I tried to keep these unbiased as much as possible since I was interested in hearing what the participants had to say about behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement with the fewest possible restrictions. That being said, it is true that I eventually concentrated on the data falling in line with my own definitions of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. In this respect, it is important to mention that the question regarding cognitive engagement was more targeted than the others. More specifically, rather than using the term 'thinking', which would have been the lay-term equivalent for cognition, I instead opted for 'mental effort'. This was because during the pilot, I found that this particular question was being answered in unrelated ways. Therefore, I switched to 'mental effort' to ensure better understanding of the question, which seemed to work adequately. I am aware that in doing so I might have tipped the participants' answers towards my understanding of cognitive engagement (i.e., psychological investment in the learning activity). However, this was a decision that I consciously made for the sake of obtaining data that I could use in this present study. In an attempt to minimise the degree of bias of this question, I provided the example from the strand of thinking 'cognitive/metacognitive strategy use' (i.e., relate new material to previous knowledge) with the hope that 'mental effort' would be understood in wider terms.

After collecting the data, in order to determine the elementary indicators of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement for this study, I conducted a grounded theory-like analysis (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, for a comprehensive explanation of this method). In practical terms, this means that through the analysis of the data obtained, I tried to reach an understanding of what the elementary indicators of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement in learning activities would be. In other words, the analytical framework I would use in this thesis to explore student ASEC engagement in learning

activities would emerge from the data acquired. The process I chose to analyse the data is briefly shown below:

1. First, I tagged repeated ideas or concepts for each dimension of engagement with codes.
2. Second, in line with my reasoning already discussed in 3.2.3, I set aside those codes which, to the best of my knowledge, were:
    a. Not applicable within subject areas that do not involve standard approaches to teaching and learning (e.g., high fives going around — Physical education)
    b. Not applicable across the variety of students (e.g., asking questions or eye contact)
    c. Not easily observable and measurable by the teacher (e.g., thinking critically and attempting to make mental connections)
    d. Not in line with the definition given to the dimension of engagement (e.g. cognitive strategy use for cognitive engagement)
3. Third, upon collating the data into codes, I reviewed the codes a second time and then grouped the codes into categories.
4. Fourth, I sought a common denominator from the remaining categories, which would embrace the ideas conveyed across the categories. By way of example, the indicator *effort to develop the activity* for cognitive engagement emerged from the categories: student(s) put forth effort to develop the activity, progress is being made that is appropriate for grade/level, the student does not give up, students are trying, students are committed to the activity, and the work reflects the effort students put into the activity).
5. Finally, after carefully assessing the suitability of the labels given to the indicators in relation to the dimensions of engagement that they represent (e.g., happiness for emotional engagement), and contrasting these against those found in the literature, the final list of elementary indicators of behavioural (academic and social), emotional, and cognitive engagement emerged (see Table 3.1).

Illustration A.1: Copy of the questionnaire



THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Recognising Student Engagement in Learning

Consent form

The purpose of this research project is to better understand **student engagement in learning activities**. This is a research project being conducted by **Nicolás Pino James** at The University of Warwick (UK). You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a **schoolteacher**.

Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without any penalty. If you do not wish to complete this survey just close your browser.

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately **one minute**. The survey questions will be about your perceptions on student engagement in learning activities.

Your responses will be **confidential** and no identifying information such as your name, or IP address will be collected. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with The University of Warwick representatives.

If you have any questions about the research study, you may contact me at n.pino-james@warwick.ac.uk

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: I have read and understand the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and, by clicking the "next" button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness voluntarily take part in the study.

Next

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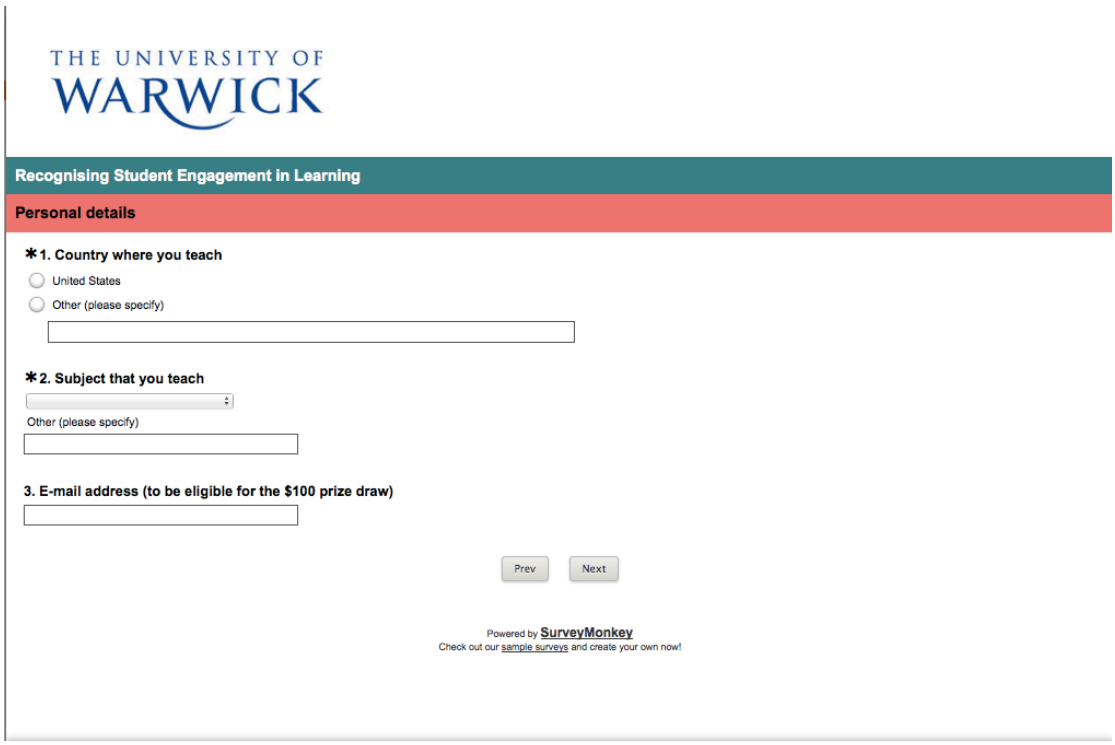

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Recognising Student Engagement in Learning

Personal details

***1. Country where you teach**

United States

Other (please specify)

***2. Subject that you teach**

Other (please specify)

3. E-mail address (to be eligible for the $100 prize draw)

Prev Next

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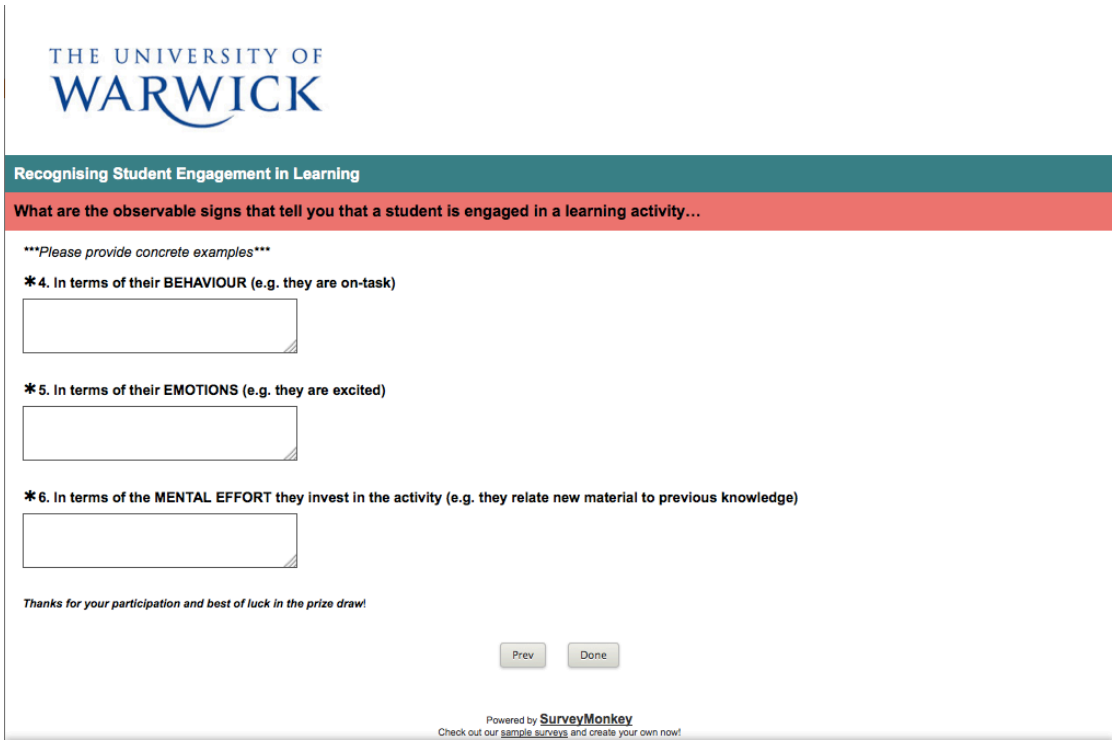

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Recognising Student Engagement in Learning

What are the observable signs that tell you that a student is engaged in a learning activity…

****Please provide concrete examples****

***4. In terms of their BEHAVIOUR (e.g. they are on-task)**

***5. In terms of their EMOTIONS (e.g. they are excited)**

***6. In terms of the MENTAL EFFORT they invest in the activity (e.g. they relate new material to previous knowledge)**

Thanks for your participation and best of luck in the prize draw!

Prev Done

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Appendix B: Sample Interview Transcript

TURN	SPEAKER	CONTENT	COMMENTS
01	Nicolás	What did you like the most about it?	
02	Sharon	The bit that we didn't have to write. Actually we had to write in all of it. I liked the bit where we could actually work in groups, instead of having to do it all individually and then work in groups for about two lessons. Because I thought the point of group work was to work in a group, not to do it all individually and then just put it together as a group.	*Complains about doing individual work.* *Complains about writing.*
03	Nicolás	Okay, what about you Helen?	
04	Helen	I liked the part when we chose who we want to work with, instead of the teacher choosing the groups.	*Autonomy to choose who to work with was positive.*
05	Sharon	Yes but we still didn't actually get to fully choose did we?	
06	Helen	Yes, true.	
07	Sharon	Because she still put us in groups and then- you've still put us in groups and then we had to choose out of them.	
08	Nicolás	David, what do you enjoy the most?	
09	David	Just...	
10	Nicolás	Just be honest, you know, this is all about honesty. If you didn't enjoy anything at all, just say it.	
11	David	I probably liked the group work, because it's something different, because most of the lessons are just by ourselves [unintelligible] yes.	*Group work seen as positive whereas individual work disliked.*
12	Nicolás	Alright, so having said that, what do you dislike about the project?	
13	Sharon	Having to do so much writing and not being able to at least speak to other people in our class. We have to work in absolute full silence.	
14	David	You're not creative really, like-	
15	Sharon	Yes it was meant to be a creative project. In our last interview thing, we said that we wanted to be more creative and do more stuff and have more freedom. And it's just been even stricter.	*Complains about Pamela's controlling behaviour*
16	Nicolás	Really?	
17	Sharon	Yes.	
18	Nicolás	Did you enjoy the first project more than the second?	
19	Sharon	No. I don't know.	
20	David	What was the type of project?	
21	Sharon	Write to the Mexicans.	
22	Nicolás	The story which ended up as a poster you made and-	
23	David	Yes, it was alright. At first it was like-	
24	Nicolás	So which one did you enjoy most?	
25	Helen	I don't know, I can't remember, I don't know which one I liked more. The second one.	*Second project liked more. The students don't' remember the project.*
26	Nicolás	The second one? Why Helen?	
27	Helen	I think the second one was more easy to do, but we had to work by ourselves for the whole thing, so it wasn't actually a group project was it? It was just like an individual project and then put it together, which I think just takes the whole subject from it away.	*The second project perceived less difficult. Complains about not doing group work.*

Appendix C: Sample of Research Journal Entry

So here I am, reflecting on yesterday's 2-hour session with Year 9. I think yesterdays' class was a success, much better than I thought it'd go. Pamela decided to start the class with a vocabulary activity based on the vocabulary they had learnt (or supposedly learnt) in the homework. In the meantime I went one by one checking all the student's homework. As it was expected, about 10 of the students did not finish the homework, 4 of them did not do it at all, and only around 6 did it all. I asked those 6 if the homework was too long or too difficult and they said no. I know they are wannabe high-achievers and perhaps they are not the right people to ask but getting the same answer from 6 of them gave me peace of mind in that sense. At least it seems that I know I did not go too far with the homework.

So well, the class went smoother than the previous one. It took them less time for the groups to get together (although it took them a while anyway). They didn't remember their groups (or said so to slow down the process). Once in groups, they chose a name for the group and roles and responsibilities. This part went extremely well. They wrote down their responsibilities and started to identify with them. I must say that I had a little clash with Pamela at this stage. Basically, I told *Los Horteras* (Sharon, Desmond, Bart, and Claire) that they could choose a name in English if they wanted. Then Pamela shouted at them because they have chosen a English name for the team…. So she made me look like a fool and the pupils were puzzled, obviously. This has happened to me a few times actually. Coming back to this, she shouted directly at Sharon (and at the end of the class as well) and actually she is one of the few ones who's actually improved dramatically. She is enjoying the project very much as I can see in her feedback and I fear that because Pamela can't stand her (I can see that everyday) this could affect her motivation to work in the project. It's very hard to see her being told off for no reason. I'll talk to Pamela about this.

As for the roles, this was a great experience, which Pamela seemed to enjoy. She took the roles seriously and started to call out on students by role. She's clearly much better than me at this! I need get more confident with the roles and start paying attention to them. Otherwise, the kids won't see the purpose of having them. I could start next session by asking the resource person to gather the reflection sheets. I think I will print out a list with all the roles for me and Pamela so we can easily identify them. This could be fun!

After choosing roles and so on they read the story I wrote for them and then they identified the 4 topics (geography, etc.) in the story. To my surprise, all the groups worked wonderfully on this - well, all except for *Los Indios* (Steve, John, Helen, Adrianna, and Hugo). I don't know if *Los Chicos Guapos* (Charlie, Tom, Daniel, Sawyer, Randolph) worked so well because they had the assistant the whole class with them. According to Pamela it was the assistant. I want to see what happens when he's not around. Angelo seems to be a real cancer for that group, let's see what happens in the following sessions.

Anyway, I think it was a success to use the main part of the class for group work. It gave us more control over the pupils. Coming back to *Los Indios*, I'm waiting to see if the group matures after the storming phase. I hope they can move to the next stage or we'll need to intervene. Let's see how they get on with the writing next week. I'm particularly interested in their reactions to the assessment of the project. It could be an eye-opener!

John is very demotivated and nothing seems to reach him. I hope this improves over time.

In the next part of the class, the pupils literally swallowed a 3:50 video on brainstorming. Due to the lack of time I had to skip some slides about the purpose of brainstorming which I would have liked to do discuss with them. But these are not normal pupils so I hoped that they would pick something up from the video and, again, to my surprise they did - most of them highlighted that in the reflection sheets. In fact, they did not open their mouths through all the video and it was a pure theoretical explanation! All 4 groups brainstormed and came up with original ideas including the topics they have to study. Surprising!

This has prodded me into thinking about the structure of the lessons. I'm starting to think that the more video I use, the better. From now on, I'll try to use more video to reach them. It's clear that they barely listen to us. Perhaps variety of speakers is the key. I'm having a dejavu so I probably wrote about this somewhere else.

At the end of the class they did the reflection. Some of them complained about the length among them but they were all finished in 5 minutes. Again, due to the lack of time I did not have time to explain the form to them and I just handed it out hoping that they would fill out correctly — and they did thanks God. I just noticed that I need to change a couple of things: the first one is that they should do the reflection sitting individually in their seats because:

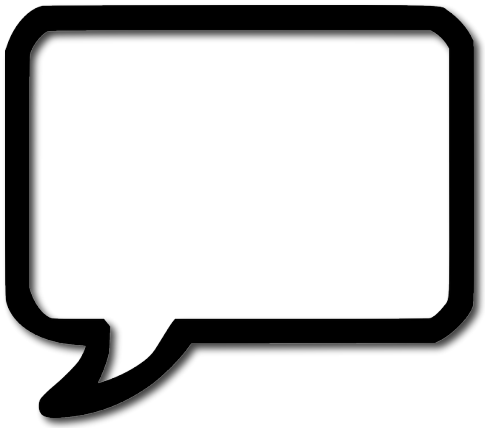
- It happened that *Los horteras* gave similar responses. This means that they reached an agreement to say the same. This is not entirely bad because it shows group work!
- Only a few of them mentioned that they have learnt Spanish in Q1: Since the project started I have learnt…

All in all, I'm very happy with the pupils' answers in the reflection sheets. They all seem to like the project and to be learning stuff. That was the main point so, mission accomplished!

At the end Pamela was complaining about all the work that this groups is giving her. This is because she has to write reports for misbehaviour and text parents when the homework is done. I totally see her point, but perhaps the problem is that she is very strict. Hence the amount of reports she needs to write? Talking about being strict (when someone needs to be), she acted very well with the pupils who have not done the homework. She remained strong and did not let them get away with it. I wouldn't have been able to be so strong in that situation. Well done Pamela.

For the next session I will try to squeeze my video of effective collaboration followed by a brief explanation. I see it difficult though but let's see how it goes. Also I need to print out new less-detailed calendars because I have realised that we will not be able to stick to the all the points. With this group, you never know how the class is going to turn out. Finally, I will go group by group ensuring that the roles are being fulfilled.

DATE
28/02/14



Reflection on project work

Name: _____

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

STUDENT'S RESPONSE

1 – FROM MY LAST REFLECTION, I HAVE LEARNT… **(SPANISH + OTHER)**

2 – THIS WILL HELP ME SUCCEED IN THE PROJECT BECAUSE…

3 – AT THIS STAGE, WHAT IS GOING WELL IN THE PROJECT IS…

4 – WHAT IS GOING NOT SO WELL IN THE PROJECT IS…

1

5 – MY GOAL(S) FOR NEXT WEEK WILL BE…

6 – IN ORDER TO SUCCEED IN THE PROJECT I SHOULD GET BETTER AT…

7 – COMMENTS ON PROJECT WORK **(EXPERIENCES, FEELINGS, ETC.)**

8 – THIS IS HOW MUCH I AM ENJOYING THE PROJECT SO FAR…

A lot! So and so Not much

Please circle your answer

2

Appendix E: Sample Open-Response Questionnaire (C2)

Name_____

A) Complete at least 2 of the following statements

1. Today I learned…

   _____

2. I was surprised by…

   _____

3. The most useful thing I will take from the this lesson is…

   _____

4. I was interested in…

   _____

5. What I liked most about this lesson was…

   _____

6. After this session I feel…

   _____

B) Complete at least 1 of the following statements

7. One thing I'm not sure about is…

   _____

8. The main thing I want to find out more about is…

   _____

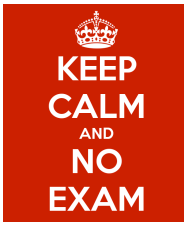
9. I might have gotten more from this lesson if…

   _____

C) Did you enjoy today's lesson? (Circle your answer)

A lot Quite Not much Not at all

Appendix F: Sample of After-project Questionnaire



REFLECTION ON PROJECT COMPLETION

STUDENT'S NAME: _____

1. This is how much Spanish I have learnt in this project	A lot · Some · A little · Not at all

TICK OFF IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE LEARNT IT

Verb tenses

- ☐ Present tense (I eat)
- ☐ Past tense (I saw)
- ☐ Verb 'haber' (there is/there are)
- ☐ Reflexive verbs (I wash myself)
- ☐ Conditional of verb 'deber' (should)

Vocabulary

- ☐ Geography (mountain, lake…)
- ☐ Describing people (long hair, ugly…)
- ☐ Life and work (go shopping, the routine…)
- ☐ Environmental problems (waste, pollution)

CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER

2. I have improved my Collaboration skills…	A lot · Some · A little · Not at all
3. I have improved my Communication skills…	A lot · Some · A little · Not at all
4. I have improved my Creativity skills…	A lot · Some · A little · Not at all
5. I have improved my Cultural skills…	A lot · Some · A little · Not at all

6. This project was motivating	A lot · Some · A little · Not at all

7. I looked forward to project work	All the time · Most of the time · Sometimes · Never

FILL IN ONE CIRCLE PER SENTENCE AND MAKE THIS KITTEN HAPPY!

In this project…	Never	Some-times	Most of the time	All the time
8. I was focused on project work	O	O	O	O
9. I paid attention to my teachers	O	O	O	O
10. I took my group role(s) seriously	O	O	O	O
11. I worked well with my group mates	O	O	O	O
12. I was told off by my teacher	O	O	O	O

When doing project work…	Never	Some-times	Most of the time	All the time
13. I was happy	O	O	O	O
14. I was bored	O	O	O	O
15. I was anxious	O	O	O	O
16. I was fed up	O	O	O	O

In this project…	Never	Some-times	Most of the time	All the time
17. I tried to work at my best	O	O	O	O
18. I did more than just the work assigned	O	O	O	O
19. I gave up in the difficult parts	O	O	O	O
20. I checked my materials (homework & handouts) to help me with the writing	O	O	O	O
21. When I didn't understand something, I kept working at it rather than asking for help	O	O	O	O

CHOOSE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION

22. My teachers have put effort into the project	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
23. My teachers have cared about my personal learning throughout the project	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
24. My teachers have had a positive attitude throughout the project	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
25. This project was interesting to me	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
26. It was great to work with real Spanish speaking people in this project (Mexican schoolchildren)	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
27. I found this project easy	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
28. I enjoyed my experience working in a group	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree

29. I found useful having a role(s) in the project	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
30. I liked the way my teachers put the groups together	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
31. I did not find useful the content of the project handbook	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
32. I found the reflection sheets useful to keep track of my progress throughout the project	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
33. The feedback comments on my reflection sheets help me move forward	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
34. I liked having freedom to make choices and decisions about the story with my group	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree
35. I liked having freedom to choose the role I wanted	☐	I strongly agree
	☐	I agree
	☐	I disagree
	☐	I strongly disagree